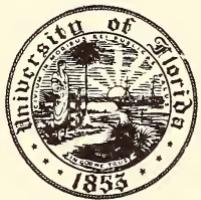


WALT WHITMAN ABROAD

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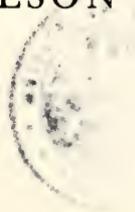
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WALT WHITMAN ABROAD

WALT WHITMAN ABROAD

*Critical Essays from Germany, France,
Scandinavia, Russia, Italy, Spain and
Latin America, Israel, Japan, and India*

Edited by
GAY WILSON ALLEN



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To
HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

BRO-DART

Preface

IT IS APPROPRIATE that 1955, the first centennial of *Leaves of Grass*, should be observed by the publication of this volume of foreign criticism of Walt Whitman in translation, for *Leaves of Grass* was acknowledged abroad as a literary masterpiece before its value was generally recognized in America.

The first foreign country to appreciate Whitman was Great Britain. Even the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was reviewed in several English journals, and the volume of selected poems edited by William Rossetti in 1868 won for the American poet such eminent friends in England as Lord Tennyson, Swinburne, Edmund Gosse, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Saintsbury, and Mrs. Anne Gilchrist. The story of Whitman's reception abroad properly begins, therefore, with Great Britain. But since Harold Blodgett's *Walt Whitman in England* is well known, and the British criticism of Whitman is more accessible to American readers than the interpretations in other languages, I have omitted any British selections here. (Two essays written in English have been included, but they come from Israel and India—also two brief statements from Japan.) In the late nineteenth century Whitman also had some enthusiastic friends in other parts of the British Empire, notably Jan Christian Smuts in South Africa, the scientist William Gay and the poet Bernard O'Dowd in Australia, and Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Trimble in New Zealand. The Trimbles compiled a concordance of *Leaves of Grass* which still remains in manuscript (now in the Brown University Library). All I can do is mention these contributions. The late Henry S. Saunders, of Toronto, Canada, was also an outstanding Whitman scholar and bibliographer.

The history of Whitman's reception in other countries I have told in part in my *Walt Whitman Handbook* (1946), but more extensive studies in this field need to be published, with the exception of Latin America, which Professor Fernando Alegría has recently treated in his brilliant *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (1954). The editor hopes that the samples of foreign criticism and selected bibliographies in the present volume will stimulate others to emulate Professor Alegría.

The selections included in this book have been chosen both for their representativeness and their importance as critical interpretations of Whitman. Some of them, such as the selection from Asselineau's recent book, compare favorably with the best criticism of the poet written in English, though the editor does not necessarily present any given selection as "the truth" about Walt Whitman. Knut Hamsun's essay, for example, is about as wrong-headed as anything in Whitman literature, but it is amusing as an "old world" misunderstanding of the last century—and as witty as any satire written on our solemn poet.

Foreign criticism of Whitman is of value also because of the attitudes revealed toward America. Although Whitman has often been misunderstood, or half-understood, by his critics abroad, he has become to most foreign readers a symbol of America and Democracy. Time after time the critics in other lands have seen in Whitman's crudities—or fancied crudities—the awkwardness of a young nation, an immature giant which has not yet learned its own strength. Others, like Dr. Chari of India, see in his writings spiritual doctrines that Americans ought to heed for their own sake as well as the survival of the free world. Whitman's influence in world literature has been mainly in the realm of ideas, and especially as a symbol of love, international brotherhood, and democratic idealism rather than in esthetics. Here his influence is rivaled only by two other American symbols, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. In view of the increasing importance—and responsibilities—of the United States in world affairs, these foreign critics of Whitman may help Americans to understand themselves, to understand the misconceptions about themselves that they must overcome, and perhaps ultimately to have a better appreciation of the role their culture can play in the survival of their civilization.

I am grateful to the authors who have graciously permitted the translation of their writings for this volume (acknowledged in footnotes for the titles), and no less grateful to the translators for their

skill and conscientious labors. The generosity of both groups has been most encouraging, and for whatever merits and uses this book may have they deserve the credit. The table of contents is my roll of honor. Rabbi Isidore S. Meyer, Librarian of the American Jewish Historical Society, arranged an interview with the poet S. Shalom and introduced me to several Hebraic scholars. To Rabbi Meyer and to all of these go my thanks, which I also extend to the staff of the New York Public Library.

My debt of gratitude to Mr. Henry Seidel Canby is so great, for his encouragement, helpful scholarship, and personal acts of kindness, that I dedicate this volume to him in partial payment.

Oradell, N. J.
June 18, 1954

G. W. A.

Note: The translator of Chukovsky's essay (pp. 158-169) retranslated some of the shorter quotations from Whitman's poem back into English instead of quoting LEAVES OF GRASS in English. These give some idea of the Russian's understanding of Whitman—not always accurate.

Notes on Translators and Contributors

FERNANDO ALEGRÍA, translator of the Montoliu and De Unamuno extracts, is Assistant Professor of Spanish in the University of California, at Berkeley.

EVIE ALLISON ALLEN, translator of the Hamsun, Jensen, and Fridholm selections, translated Frederik Schyberg's *Walt Whitman* (1951).

ROGER ASSELINEAU, translator of the Larbaud, Catel, Pavese, and Papini selections, as well as the extract from his own book, is Professor of American and English literature in the Université de Lyon, France. He taught for two years at Harvard.

ARNOLD CHAPMAN, translator of the Martí article, is Assistant Professor of Spanish in the University of California, at Berkeley.

V. K. CHARI, author of "Americanism Reviewed," has written a doctoral dissertation on Walt Whitman and now teaches in Durbar College, Rewa, India.

SEYMOUR FLAXMAN, translator of the Pongs essay, is Assistant Professor of German in University College, New York University.

HORST FRENZ, translator of the Freiligrath, Reisiger, and Mann selections, is Professor of English and Chairman of Comparative Literature in Indiana University.

SHOLOM K. KAHN, author of the hitherto unpublished essay on "Whitman's Sense of Evil," a native of New York City who took his Ph.D. at New York University, now teaches in Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

SIGRID MOE, translator of the Krogvig essay, was born in Norway and is Professor of English at Ottawa University, Kansas. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation at New York University on Whitman and Wergeland.

SAMUEL PUTNAM, translator of the Mirsky essay, is the late distinguished translator of *Don Quixote* and author of a history of Brazilian literature. He translated from many languages.

STEPHEN STEPANCHEV, author of the two introductions on Whitman in Slavic countries and translator of the anonymous Russian essay, is Assistant Professor of English in Queens College, Flushing, N. Y. He is known as a poet and critic.

BENJAMIN M. WOODBRIDGE, JR., translator of the abridgment of Freyre's monograph, is Assistant Professor of Portuguese in the University of California, at Berkeley.

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Whitman in Germany

THE WHITMAN LITERATURE in Germany (translations, criticism, and scholarly studies of his influence) is so extensive that a brief sketch can do no more than indicate the general outlines. Ferdinand Freiligrath was a political exile in England when William Rossetti's edition of Whitman's poems appeared in 1868. He wrote an enthusiastic account of the American poet and translated several extracts from the poems for a German newspaper, but two decades passed before the German literary world began to take notice of *Leaves of Grass* and its author. In 1882 a German-American, Karl Knortz, published in New York a monograph on "Walt Whitman, der Dichter der Demokratie," which was reprinted in Germany and went through several editions. Knortz also collaborated with T. W. Rolleston on the translation of a selected volume of Whitman's poems, which was finally published in Switzerland in 1889 after the German police had forbidden its publication in Germany.

During the next two decades a Whitman cult grew up in Germany. The most ardent of his worshippers was Johannes Schlaf, a young poet, who made the promotion of Whitman his life-work, translating him, imitating him, and eulogizing his life. In 1904 Karl Federn published a better translation than either Knortz and Rolleston's or Schlaf's. The same year Wilhelm Schölermann attempted to translate Whitman into rhyme, and to compare him, not unfavorably, to the *Ganzmenschen* (man of men), Jesus of Nazareth. Already a reaction had begun, and the first wave of Whitmania gradually subsided, though he continued to be read and

translated during World War I, and more than one German poet read him in the trenches. Meanwhile, the Social-Democrats had discovered him, and he became an oracle for this political party.

At the end of the First World War a second Whitman cult arose. Hans Reisiger, the most gifted translator that had yet appeared, published a selection of the poems in 1919 and three years later a two volume edition containing *Leaves of Grass* and the major prose works. This translation was quickly accepted as a classic and Hermann Stehr declared, "It is as if the great American had written not in English, but in German." Thomas Mann called it a "holy gift," and he tried to use Whitman to bolster Germany's experiment in democracy. But as National Socialism rose, Whitman's reputation in Germany declined, and three of his most ardent admirers—Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel, and Thomas Mann—became exiles. Some of the Nazi poets are said to have found something in Whitman to admire, but the record of his influence during this tragic period is confused.

No strong Whitman movement sprang up in Germany after World War II, but the "poet of democracy" was again read and discussed. Hans Reisiger had survived, and in 1946 he reissued his translation in four small volumes. The following year the University of Munich conferred an honorary doctor's degree upon this distinguished translator, a very unusual recognition in the academic world of Germany. Two years later Henry Seidel Canby's excellent biography of Whitman was translated into German and attracted considerable attention. In 1948 also Georg Goyert, the famous translator of James Joyce into German, published a small volume of selected poems that the critics praised with enthusiasm.

Recently a German scholar, Dr. Hermann Pongs, professor emeritus of Göttingen University, published in the United States a provocative comparative study of Whitman and Stefan George, interpreting George as representative of decadent Europe and Whitman as spokesman of young, optimistic, and virile America. Whitman has always appealed to Germans more as a symbol than as the complex literary personality he was in reality, but Professor Pongs has demonstrated that this symbolic power has new subtleties and continued vitality.

Walt Whitman*

By Ferdinand Freiligrath

Translated by Horst Frenz

WALT WHITMAN. WHO IS WALT WHITMAN? The answer is: a poet. A new American poet. His admirers claim him as the first poet, the only poet America has hitherto produced. The only genuinely American poet, one who does not follow in the worn footsteps of the European Muse. On the contrary—a poet coming fresh from the prairies and the settlements, from the coast and the huge rivers, from among the thronging crowds of port and city, from the Southern battlefields; with the fragrance of his native soil in his beard, his hair and his dress; a unique personality with his feet firmly and consciously on American ground; a herald announcing great events magnificently, though often in a strange way. His admirers go even further: for them, Walt Whitman is the only poet representative of the laboring, striving, searching time; the poet *par excellence—the poet*.

Such is the tenor of his admirers, among them even an Emerson. On the other hand, we find the fault-finders, those deprecating the poet. Side by side with unbounded encomium and enthusiastic appraisal we find bitter biting sarcasm and invidious slander.

The poet, of course, is not concerned with those voices. Praise he accepts as being his due, scorn he meets with his scorn. He believes in himself; there is no limit to his self-assurance. An English editor of his works, W. M. Rossetti, says, "He is the one man who entertains and professes respecting himself the grave conviction that he is the actual and prospective founder of a new poetic literature, and a great one—a literature proportional to the material vastness and unmeasured destinies of America: he believes that the Columbus of the continent or the Washington of the States was not more truly than himself in the future a founder and upbuilder of this America. Surely a sublime conviction, and expressed more than once in magnificent words—none more so than the lines beginning, 'Come, I will make this continent indissoluble.' " This is pride, indeed. Has the man a right to talk as he talks? Let us consider him more closely. Let us discuss his life and his poetry. Let us, to begin with, open his book.

*First published in *Allgemeinen Zeitung*, Augsburg, April 24, 1868; reprinted in *Gesammelte Dictungen*, Stuttgart, 1877.

Are they verses? The lines are broken like verse, but are not really verse. No metre, no rhyme, no stanzas. Nothing but rhythmic prose, long rhythmic lines. At first glance rough, clumsy, without form; but still, for the sensitive ear, they do not lack sonority. His language simple, crude and plain, straightforward, unafraid and, at times, obscure, but always the right word for everything. The mood sybilline, rhapsodic, mixing the sublime and the trite, violating rules of taste. Certain passages of his—notwithstanding their basic dissimilarity—remind one of our Hamann or of Carlyle's oracular wisdom or of "Les Paroles d'un Croyant." Everything echoes the Bible—its language, not its creed.

What is it the poet conveys through this form? First of all, himself, his ego, Walt Whitman. This ego, however, is part of America, part of the world, part of humanity, part of the universe. This is how he sees himself, unrolling before our eyes a magnificent panorama of the world, intertwining the small with the large, taking his point of departure in America (the future belongs to a free country only) and returning to it over and over again. A touch of the cosmic is part of Walt Whitman's individuality and his American character, as it may be found in those who, fond of meditating in the presence of infinity, have spent lonely days on the seashore, lonely nights under the starry sky of the prairie. He is part of the universe, as the universe is part of himself. He, Walt Whitman the individual, is embodying humanity and the world. Humanity and the world, for him, are one great poem. Whatever he may see, hear, touch, with whatever he may come in contact, in all of it he sees a symbol of a higher, a spiritual realm, even in the most trivial, the most common, the most ordinary things of daily life. Or rather, matter and spirit, reality and ideal are for him one and the same. Thus he appears to us: one who is responsible for his own making; one who strides along singing; one who, first and foremost a human being, a proud and free human being, opens up universal perspectives of social and political significance.

What a marvelous personality. We admit that we are moved by it and excited, that we cannot forget it. At the same time, however, we find that our judgment of him is as yet incomplete, that we are still under the spell of our first impression. In the meantime, perhaps as the first ones in Germany, we want to take note of the life and work of this fresh, new force. It is appropriate that our poets and thinkers examine more closely this strange new fellow-artist who threatens to upset our *ars poetica*, our aesthetic theories and canons. Indeed, after having listened carefully to these profound

pages and having intimately acquainted ourselves with the sonorous roaring of the paradoxically rhapsodic style overwhelming us like waves in perpetual motion, our pattern of versification, our attempts to squeeze a thought into conventional forms, our onomatopoetic endeavor, our counting and weighing of syllables, our sonneteering and our constructing of lines and stanzas—all of it seems almost childish. Have we really reached that point where life, even in poetry, imperiously calls for new modes of expression? Does our time have so much and so many important things to say that old vessels no longer suffice to hold new contents? Are we on the verge of a “poetry of the future” similar to that “music of the future” which, for so many years now, has been promised to us? Is Walt Whitman more than Richard Wagner?

Of the poet's personality and his life we learn that he is almost fifty years old. He was born on May 31, 1819. His birthplace is a village, West Hills, on Long Island in the state of New York. His father, farmer, carpenter and architect successively, was a descendant of English colonists; his mother, Louise van Velsor, of Dutch origin. He received his primary education in a school in Brooklyn, a suburb of New York; when he was thirteen, he had to support himself, as a printer first and then later as a teacher and correspondent for several New York newspapers. In 1849, we find him in New Orleans as a newspaper editor; two years afterwards, again, as a printer in Brooklyn. Thereafter—like his father—he became, for a while, a carpenter and master builder. In 1862, after the outbreak of the Civil War—an enthusiastic Unionist and Abolitionist, he unswervingly took the side of the Northern States—he received, with Emerson's help, special permission from Lincoln to take care of wounded soldiers on the battlefields. He did all this on the condition—he had explicitly insisted upon it—that he would not be paid in any form for such services. Beginning in the spring of 1863, on the battlefield and even more in the Washington hospital, nursing became his sole preoccupation by day and night. Only one opinion prevails concerning his boundless self-sacrifice, his friendliness and kindness while carrying on the difficult work. Every wounded soldier, whether from the South or from the North, was given the same loving care by the poet. It has been claimed that until the end of the war, he had taken care of more than 100,000 sick or wounded. For six months, he himself was severely ill with a kind of hospital fever, his first real sickness. After the war he was given an inferior position with the Ministry of the Interior in Washington, but lost it in 1865 when Secretary Harlan learned that Whitman was the

author of the *Leaves of Grass*. Its bluntness or, as Mr. Harlan viewed it, its immorality filled the Secretary's heart with abhorrence. The poet, after a while, found another modest position in the office of the Attorney General in Washington, where he is now residing. On Sundays and occasionally during the week, he still goes out to visit the hospitals.

Whitman is a simple person, a man of few needs, poor and, in his own words, without the talent for acquiring profits. His strength, he confided to his visitor, Mr. Conway—an American living in London—lies in “loafing and writing poetry.” He has found out that one can live easily and happily on water and bread. Conway found him on Long Island, probably before the war, lying in the grass in a 100 degree temperature, staring into the sun. Just like Diogenes. “With his grey clothing, his blue-grey shirt, his iron-grey hair, his swart sun-burnt face and bare neck, he lay upon the brown-and-white grass . . . and was so like the earth upon which he rested, that he seemed almost enough a part of it for one to pass by without recognition.” He did not consider it too hot and confided to Conway that this was one of his favorite spots and one of his favorite positions in writing poetry. His lodgings Conway found to be of the utmost simplicity—a small room, sparsely furnished, with only one window facing the sandy plain of Long Island. Not a single book in the room. Yet he talked of the Bible, of Homer and Shakespeare as the favorite books in his possession. He had two very special studios, he said—the rooftop of a bus and Coney Island, a desolate sandy isle in the Atlantic Ocean, miles off the shore.

“Well, he *looks* like a man,” Lincoln is said to have uttered when seeing Whitman for the first time. This saying reminds us of Napoleon’s remark concerning Goethe: “Voilà un homme.”

His writings, up to this time, comprise the above-mentioned *Leaves of Grass*—first edition in 1855, composed and printed by the poet himself; second edition in 1856; third edition in 1860; “Drum Taps” (1865), written after the war, with a “Sequel” containing a magnificent rhapsody upon Abraham Lincoln’s death; and, published during the past year, his *Collected Works* with an appendix, “Songs before Parting”. A selection from the *Collected Works* has recently been published in London by W. M. Rossetti, one of Whitman’s English admirers. The most infatuous crudities of the original have been omitted in it, the editor thereby intending to pave the way for a publication and unprejudiced reception of Whitman’s complete works in England. We are indebted, for the above sketch of the poet’s life, to Mr. Rossetti’s “Prefatory Notice.”

These comments shall suffice for the present. We definitely intend to resume, shortly, the discussion of this man and publish a few examples from his works in translation, although it is a risky thing to judge Whitman by samples. The "Ex Pede Herculem" is hardly applicable to him; he, if any poet, has to be known and studied in the totality of his works.

A Child Went Forth*

By Hans Reisiger

Translated by Horst Frenz

WALT WHITMAN WAS ONE OF those particularly gifted human beings who from childhood into old age remained secure in the strength and warmth of a maternal world. In the midst of all the visions and passions of a world free and multiform, seizing his lonely breast, there remained with him, at all times, the invisible smile of a child belonging to the essence out of which it had been born. Again and again he would have only had to recall this essence in order to return to it like a little child, in spite of the wrinkles on his forehead and the grey hair and beard. The genuine ardor of his spirited prophesy as to a race beautiful, proud, "athletic" and "electric"—a race chaste, tender, compassionate and "fluctuating along with nature"—in itself originates in the maternal womb out of which he had been delivered into this life: "well-born and brought up by a perfect mother." Mothers give birth to men; thus, it is the prime task of a new race to bring forth mothers of spiritual and physical perfection. The maternal womb serves as the threshold to which innumerable germs throng for new sowings. Forever and ever, birth, following after birth and re-birth, labors to achieve new essence out of the maternal spheres.

In the eyes of a mother, small things may grow important, and the large and world-wide things may become simple and as natural as a glance or a kiss. Part of this strength—strength with the help of which Whitman comprehends everything, small as well as large, in this world uniting and equalizing all with the aid of love—perhaps arises from the fortunate equipoise of all facets—thoughts and acts

*Title supplied by editor, in the spirit of Dr. Reisiger's biography published as the introduction to his *Walt Whitmans Werk*, Berlin: S. Fischer, 1922. Printed by kind permission of the author.

—of his nature in the presence of maternal love. And his rejection of all cowardice and shame in the souls of men was determined quiescently, for throughout his life, he had never felt a need to feel remorseful, timid and pale about his own emotions, reactions which are detrimental to continued growth. For in the presence of his mother's understanding and ennobling glance, everything had always been open and clearly perceptible. Although but very few of his psalm-like stanzas are addressed to his mother personally, his entire work is permeated by the concept of pure and noble motherhood to an extent which would justify its classification as one continuous invocation to the one "that is giving birth," to the "harmonious image of the earth, to the fulfillment beyond which philosophy never reaches nor intends to reach, to the very mother of men."

* * * * *

It is inherent in Walt Whitman's nature that the pale, magic translucence of childhood, the radiance of the first blissful awareness of existence, never faded altogether in him. Never, in his soul, did those portals close which take most people by surprise when one fine morning they fall shut with the jarring sound of daily routine, locking out the domain of childhood and making prisoners of them in a disenchanted world in which things shrivel under the influence of the inexorable power of habit and in which the soul rushes or creeps, dumbfounded, from moment to moment. In the midst of existence, which should make us tremble with genuine wonderment as the hours pass, this sacred power struggles forth from the abused souls only with difficulty. They will no longer be able to recapture that primal splendor in which, once upon a time, appeared to them flower and bird, wind and calmness, closeness and distance, the living cosmos surrounding them and their Ego. The power of wonderment, apex of the human soul and source of all religious activity and creation, grew unimpaired and unrestrained out of the nature of Walt Whitman's childhood into the nature of his mature age: that wonderment of the heart which denotes repose and trust in the incomprehensible as the power to which one is eternally bound.

Thus, from all sides of Walt Whitman's poetry, unrefracted rays shoot forth, back to the dim beginnings of his youth—the inexplicable tears of a child, shed in experiencing the lonely impact of the night and of the dark and boundless ocean, in listening to the half-understood lamentations of the thrush singing of love and death, sparkle like dewdrops on the songs of this man.

Profound, rich and passionate, such is the imagination of every child; and if, later in his life, it is not quenched by the consuming sterility of daily routine, it will continue to pulsate in the blood until death overcomes it. It is idle to ask the conventional question, "If even then?" or the like. If I feel able to talk eloquently about the days of my childhood, I myself have retained the child while becoming a man, one continuous, incarnate soul.

* * * * *

One could hardly express more convincingly and more plainly the continuous unity of the wondrous awe pervading all life than do the last lines of this song ["There Was a Child Went Forth"]. Man's vision extends beyond that of childhood, comprehends the whole earth and all the spheres in which different suns and plants revolve, and embraces infinity whose secret pervades and transports the visible. Yet the soul behind this power of vision remains unchanged, and the commonest things, the things within our closest reach, do not lose their magic but become ever more deeply immersed in the miracle of existence. The same mysterious breath which lingers over the brownish cloud banks in the clear blue sky enwraps the dead who appear to the poet in his reveries of pulsating life. It is the same breath of God which enfolds the burning bodies of man and wife uniting in the ecstasy of procreation.

* * * * *

Many kindred traits began to vibrate in him [Whitman] as so many unconscious, magnetic currents, traits that in his maturity and old age manifested themselves as essentials of his own nature. Later in his life, he enjoyed emphasizing the Quaker element in himself. The "inner light," spiritual intuition, became for him the guiding star in thought and action. Self-respect, and arising from it, respect for his fellow-creatures, constituted the foundation of life, the very air which he breathed. The fact that this elevation and the visionary solitude did not lead him to isolation, but to a warm-hearted, effluent community spirit, to that comradeship glowing with spiritualized Eros and to the idea of true democracy—democracy as a free society of self-reliant and self-controlled individuals, of the "divine average" (a *leitmotif* throughout his poetry)—gives evidence of his affinity to the ancient doctrine of Quakerism, *i.e.*, the doctrine of spiritual union and brotherhood of all those who have entered into the consciousness of God.

Even in his personal character and behavior appeared the racial communion with old "friends," for every ethos bears the features

of its own race. His honesty and simplicity, his composure and discretion, his friendliness toward everybody, his indifference to established rules of social behavior—all those were true characteristics of Quakerism. After having poured the volcanic fire of his mature age into powerful songs, his genius became more and more dominated by a milder spirit. It should be pointed out here that we would commit a grave error in assuming that Whitman, even during the time of his most passionate and daring productivity, was anything like a man of violence. The most profound element of his unrestraint is calmness; yet he was able to express even the most ruthless things because in his language and voice forever vibrates the timbre of mystic tenderness denoting the soul's communion with itself. Every strong creed originates in the domain of silence and awe. Emerson's famous words which he sent to Carlyle together with a copy of the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856): "One book . . . a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength," point out only one element in the writing most congenial to Emerson's concern with what is fit for "good" society. Actually, even the most sweeping lines of those songs are full of that fervor that has helped to tear them loose from the quiescence of a profound, tender, chaste and pious nature; in between them, again and again, a strange, leisurely smile breaks forth, the shadow of a gesture signifying the words: Why do we speak at all? What are words? Do we not hear the transcendent language of the Unspeakable pervading them?

Whitman himself, at the end of his "Song of Myself," speaks of his "barbaric yawp" sounding over the roofs of the world, and uses this poetic picture as the finale of this powerful rhapsody. At the very climax of his perception of life and death, he falls short of breath; he stands, his voice faltering, at the edge of the sunset in which the physical and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite seem to dissolve in the flaky and fiery shreds of cloud. Then, in the very depth of his soul a cry rings out, lonely, sad, and yet rapturous, similar to that of the nocturnal cry of a falcon. (It reminds me of the last line of Gottfried Keller's wonderful poem: "Far off, wild and sad the falcons' voices sounded.") Whitman's relentlessness is not forced, superimposed or abrupt; it is the natural progression in the process of naming and interpreting all objects and all feelings. In particular his songs devoted to the love of both sexes and the glorification of sex—so widely and so often attacked—are radiant with loneliness, calmness and purity. By speaking out, by realizing them through the medium of a virile and chaste voice all those

feelings are purified, sanctified and uplifted into the sphere of existence in which everything is natural. A fragrance is about them as fresh as that issuing forth from his mother's clothes when he touched them as a boy.

* * * * *

All his actions were marked by a certain lassitude, the composure that comes to those whose best qualities mature not through activity but by absorbing tranquility. Whatever attracted him and tempted him to linger, he enjoyed with the quiet repose of the growing vegetative life. The myriad tongues of metropolitan life murmured in his soul like the rush of reeds or the roaring of the sea of our soul, a choir perpetually one with all existence. In his "Democratic Vistas," he explicitly took a stand against the separation of "nature" and "city." His senses are never dulled or strained to excitement by the hubbub of the streets, but take it in with the same alacrity as they do sea, air, and woods.

The pulse beat of this ruthlessly expanding twin city [New York-Brooklyn] was not in the least a slow or peaceful one. Everything there seemed animated with an apprehension of the future. At that time, New York had a population of 200,000 and was growing from year to year. People of different races kept moving into this most opportune of harbors, mixing with the stock of the early English immigrants. The blazing summer sun glared and the icy winter chill blew through the streets of this city full of contrasts. Broadway swarmed with thousands of vehicles, stagecoaches, buses, carriages, and horsemen, altogether more colorful and livelier than in our time. All classes of society participated in the activities that Broadway offered. As yet, the huge grey stone buildings and giant-shaped skyscrapers were not there; instead, the brick houses—looking more colorful and gayer. Even catastrophes, now and then caused by the forces opposed to man's habitation, assumed the character of sombre festivities. The fire alarm, with its tinkling of bells and blowing of bugles, summoned thousands of people to the burning scene where firemen—clad in red and entangled with the intestines of fire hoses, ladders, hooks, and ropes—did their work defying death. In December, 1835, within three days, 13 acres of old buildings burnt down completely. In more than one passage of Whitman's poetry we are aware of the ringing of the fire alarm. In the evening, theatres opened up. In the huge Bowery, for instance, holding 3000 spectators, famous English guest stars played to an audience of raving, roaring workers and craftsmen enthusiastically

applauding. There played the famous Booth, whom the 15-year-old Whitman had a first chance to see as Richard III. Whitman for the first time in his life was thrilled by the impact of the artistic expression, the spoken word, the inspired gesture. In retrospect only are we able to grasp the intense emotion which was thus stirred up in the boy. We can imagine how he must have been impressed by the living word, he who, until late in his life, believed in his vocation as an orator as well as a poet, a great popular orator who with his powerful voice would lead the American people, would master them.

* * * * *

The more there grew in Whitman the feeling of belonging to the race of his New World and the old frontier spirit, now transformed into the psychic-human element, the feeling to discover and conquer with this race on a giant virgin continent the new country of men; to produce, out of this rich and polymorphous clay, perfect sons and daughters of this New World—and thus of the whole earth—the more he felt tempted to acquaint himself with that part of his native America so different in many ways: the Southern States of the Union.

The more Whitman's capacity to marvel at all things transformed the material world around him into a symbolic world made translucent with spiritual infinity—in other words, the more profound his love for the world of phenomena grew because of their miraculous existence, the more essences and objects gained for him colorful, comprehensible, mobile, pathetic and joyous reality while enclosed in the eternal, univocal reality of the invisible—the more he was to be impressed with every step further into this world of phenomena, into that part of the earth revealing to him its treasure of lavish creative splendor, displaying new colors and fragrances, new harmonies, gestures and symbols, intense brightness and procreative power.

The southern United States presented a picture so radically different from that of the north, as countries bordering the southern Mediterranean do from the northern part of Germany, if not more so. Whitman left the still uncouth winter region to approach a most luxuriant spring.

There is no need to tell with what strange feelings a man, being used to account for geographic relations and the daily as well as annual rotation of our globe, would start out on a journey across a part of this earth he does not know. Following the Ohio river

along the newly settled states of Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Illinois, still breathing forth and exhaling the fragrance of unexplored backwoods, he came upon the "Father of Waters," the Mississippi, seeing the whole life of this gigantic stream spread out before his eyes. This river, which together with its tributaries supplies half of the arable land of the United States, he held to be the very artery of the New World around which the innermost life of a splendid future would pulsate. This great land called forth, at first mysteriously and impellingly, a similar greatness, spiritual and poetic, something completely new, immediate and challenging; something to continue, to fulfill all older cultures, or at least something equally significant.

* * * * *

To say that he hated earning a living, and, in order to keep faith with poverty, stopped working as a carpenter, seems to apply—as many of his overly enthusiastic admirers do—standards of interpretation apt to glorify his case. It is true, however, that, as the years went by, he came to neglect this profitable craft for the sake of his higher interests; true also that he gave in, unconcerned with gain or loss, at all times to leisure and independent life, not always to the liking of his worried and somewhat embittered father.

This interest consisted in nothing less than the firm decision to give expression, poetically and spiritually, to the manifold ways and varied thoughts of the American people with which he had become intimately acquainted during his journey—an expression which would do justice to their peculiar and original strength, so as to constitute what one may call the Bible of a truly modern, democratic human race. With all his might he directed his powers, during the seven years prior to the publication of the *Leaves of Grass*, to this goal.

Each time a wooden structure had been completed, Whitman went on a vacation which often lasted for weeks. He retired to nature to roam about the island, to take a sunbath on the beach, to swim, to read and to recite. Here, against nature's background, he first tried out his songs. In them he sought to recapture a rhythm corresponding to that of the sea.

Even when working, he carried a book, a magazine or newspaper in his pocket. Throughout his life he remained an ardent reader of newspapers. They communicated to him the feeling of manifold reality, of actual events; through them he heard the sombre roaring of the masses and their interaction of which he was

so fond, the "en masse" to which he devoted his life and his poetry. He read the classical authors, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare and Ossian, *Don Quixote* and the *Song of the Nibelungs*, and whatever else he could lay his hands on. From his early youth he loved and knew well *A Thousand and One Nights* and Scott's ballads. He himself has told us that when he was young he was a book fiend who devoured everything.

* * * * *

The "Consuming Fire" of which he is possessed does not urge him to construct a philosophical system, but rather to give expression to his very being with a mystic force in which reality, the living dream of being pulsates. Within him lives the miracle of identity, the miracle of the absolute, the true self in the individual self, the miracle of the finite and the infinite intertwined; it throbs with the heartbeat of each second, sees, hears, feels, smells, thinks, rejoices, suffers with him in all his senses. The words for which he is grasping are mere suggestions for the eternal, unspoken, forever true words. Each of them he tries to steep in the essence and wonder of his own existence, in order to invoke, through them and their passionate thronging or through their tender, trembling loneliness in some whispered phrase, that power which alone enables us to understand what he really means: the power of a profoundly natural ecstasy—that ecstasy which should make every one of us hold our breath every day and every hour, whilst we perceive the fabulous wonder of our existence. Thus the indifference accompanying everyday life, the unconcerned tranquility which we display in our dubious familiarity with today and tomorrow, should be looked upon as the greatest and most extraordinary phenomenon.

This is the reason readers of Whitman are so frequently reminded of the difference between what he really is and what his readers imagine him to be. Why is it that he escapes them continually, with every single word, and yet waits for them, somewhere, calmly and leisurely? By "waiting for them" is meant precisely that natural and mystic awareness of the self which exists in the reader as well as in Whitman himself. To lead his readers to that awareness is the real and innermost purpose of his poetry. Therefore it is so difficult to make any statements about Whitman outside of the sphere which he himself has only now created, a sphere which makes perceptible his meaning. That is why his words are so transparent, why they have such exceptional appeal, a singular quality. Hence, too, the intense power of the word "love," ringing through-

out all his songs. Love is but the feeling of attachment, of belonging to a living image hovering in the infinite and permeated by it, a feeling which finds its consummation in the tender intensity of comradeship. The well-known English critic John A. Symonds once said: "Whitman, indeed, is extremely baffling to criticism. I have already said in print that 'speaking about him is like speaking about the universe.' . . . Not merely because he is large and comprehensive, but because he is intangible, elusive, at first sight self-contradictory, and in some sense formless, does Whitman resemble the universe and defy critical analysis." (*Walt Whitman*, page 33.) He would like best to have the reader, the lover, the friend carry his book with him in his coat pocket, to have it rest on his hip, very close to him; for it is not just a book: "Who touches this touches a man." It is not contained in time. The course of centenniums and milleniums forever rolling along is nothing in the face of the eternal tides of truth.

Thomas Mann To Hans Reisiger*

Translated by Horst Frenz

I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE your Whitman book and cannot thank you enough for this great, important, indeed holy gift; for that matter, the German public, it seems to me, can not be grateful enough either. Since I have received the two volumes, I have opened them again and again, reading here and there. I have read the biographical introduction from end to end and consider it a little masterpiece of love. It is really a great achievement on your part that after years of devotion and enthusiasm you have brought close to us this powerful spirit, this exuberant, profound new personification of humanity. We Germans who are old and immature at one and the same time can benefit from contact with this personality, symbol of the future of humanity, if we are willing to accept him. To me personally, who has been striving for so many years, in my own laborious way, after the idea of humanity, convinced that no task is more urgent for Germany than to give a new meaning to this idea—which has become a mere empty shell, a mere school phrase—to me this work of yours is a real gift from God, for I see what Walt Whitman calls “Democracy” is essentially nothing else than what we, in a more old-fashioned way, call “Humanity.” I see, too, that to awaken the feelings of the new humanity has not been accomplished by Goethe alone, but that a dose of Whitman is needed; and this all the more so because these two have a good deal in common, these two ancestors of ours, especially as regards sensuality, “Calamus,” and sympathy with the organic. . . . In short, your deed—this word is not too big nor too strong—can be of immeasurable influence. . . .

*Letter of congratulation sent by Thomas Mann to Hans Reisiger in thanks for a copy of Reisiger's translation of Whitman, printed in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, April 16, 1922. Reprinted by permission of Dr. Mann.

Walt Whitman and Stefan George*

By Hermann Pongs

Translated by Seymour L. Flaxman

IF WE DISREGARD FREILIGRATH's samples of verse in 1868 and a lecture on Whitman in 1883 by the Irishman Rolleston, the year 1889 marks the real beginning of Whitman's influence [in Germany]. A first translation of *Leaves of Grass* by Knortz and Rolleston was published by Schabelitz in Switzerland. Inadequate and consisting of selections, it was, nevertheless, greeted as the "Bible of Democracy," and had an immediate effect on the young Naturalistic generation, Johannes Schlaf and Arno Holz. The influence increased with the Reclam edition of *Leaves of Grass* (by Johannes Schlaf) in 1907, and rose in 1922 to the great two-volume Fischer edition in Hans Reisiger's excellent translation. The influence went beyond the early Naturalists (Arno Holz as a "Whitman with style"). It flooded through the lyrics of the Impressionists (Paquet, the later Dehmel). It inspired the Expressionists—Däubler's "Nordlicht" (Northern Lights) rhymes Whitman with *Rhythmen* ("rhythms"), that is the way he expressed his gratitude, Arnim T. Wegner's "Antlitz der Städte" (Face of the Cities) begins with verses from Whitman, Werfel's early work lived on Whitman. It finally penetrated the lyrics of the proletarian poets, and in Lersch's "Mensch im Eisen" (Man in Iron) (1925) reached a perfection that was just as barbaric as it was original and German.

At that very time in 1889 the twenty-one year old George in Paris was strengthening his native consciousness of form and culture with Mallarmé's mastery, with the image and word cult of the Sym-

*"Walt Whitman und Stefan George," *Comparative Literature*, IV, 289-322 (Fall, 1952). Translation published by permission of the editor of *Comparative Literature* and the author. Quotations from George's poems from *The Works of Stefan George*, rendered into English by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, No. 2, 1949. By permission of the University of North Carolina Press and Dr. Frederick Coenen, editor of the series.

Dr. Pongs is Professor Emeritus of Göttingen University. He is also the author of "Zum aufschliessenden Symbol bei Wilhelm Raabe" [described by Professor Pongs as "methodisch wichtig, auch im Anschluss an die aufschliessende Symbolik Whitmans"], *Jahrbuch für Ästhetik*, I, 161-209 (1951), and *Im Umbruch der Zeit*, Göttingen: Verlagsanstalt, 1952.

bolists. With the *Blätter für die Kunst* (*Journal of Art*) he began his quiet, stern, esoteric influence on the young generation of intellectuals, to the point of collecting a selected circle, raising his own poetry to the heights of *Der Siebente Ring* (*The Seventh Ring*), *Stern des Bundes* (*Star of the Covenant*), and *Das Neue Reich* (*The Kingdom Come*) (1928). The death of the *Blätter* (*Journal*) in 1919, the impotence of the George epigones, the transformation of the George influence into intellectual history, a kind of literary research into the George circle, indicated the intensification of the George cult that was counteracting the expansion of Whitman.

With that both poets now stood for opposing world forces, which joined in the fateful battle for the German soul at the same moment. It was a fateful battle. The Germany of the Age of the Founding Fathers had become the intellectual battlefield on which the great Russians, Scandinavians, Frenchmen, and Belgians met. Under the slogan of "Naturalism," form-exploding vital forces that had been released to the Age of the Masses concentrate in poetry. The counter-slogan "Symbolism" embraces those things which in consciousness of form and culture oppose such a breakthrough; such as, "Neo-Romanticism," "Neo-Classicism," "Neo-Idealism," etc. In Whitman and George this play of forces forms the most extreme opposing tension by penetrating into the basic element of the lyric, into the rhythm. Whitman—this is the first naive rhythmical mastery of the technical age, in a thundering mass-rhythm that is traditionless, but that sweeps one along. On the other hand, George represents the most extreme concentration and melting down of the European cultural heritage into the German word substance, in a sternly composed, liturgically solemn, monopodic rhythm.¹

The contrast thus becomes so absolute that there clearly appears in it a difference in poetic type which confirms that ingenious distinction of Schiller's in 1795, the separation of the naive and the sentimental poet, in a new and surprising way. As a separation in which continents face each other. In Whitman—the young America, naively grown into the rise of technology, in a still unformed abundance, unspoiled, unencumbered by tradition. In George—the European cultural consciousness stamped by an ancient Greek-Roman-Christian heritage, which, since Rousseau, has been on the way to "finding lost Nature," to restoring it again and again in freedom as an integral whole from the idea. The extensiveness with which Schiller once outlined the two types, while in an inner strug-

gle with his antipode Goethe, is, as an expression of poetry and as the existential power of the Realist and the Idealist, marked by an abundance of philosophical formulae. Acquired from the examples of Schiller's age, these continue to prove true here in the contrast of the continents. At the same time there is no mistaking the change of century that separates Goethe from Whitman, Schiller from George, Goethe's link to the object from the panegyrist of the technologized Age of the Masses, who hungers for material and whose material is crude, and the freedom of Schiller's mind, his soaring ideas from the powerful magic with which George, as priest of the god of his own creation, surrounds his cultist congregation in poetry. Both, however, express themselves in the symbols of poetry that also illuminate the unconscious.

I

Nothing can be more obvious for a first point of departure than the outer contour that appears in the contrast of the titles chosen by the two poets for their books. Whitman has only one, always the same one, from the first edition in 1855 to the tenth in 1892, the year he died—*Leaves of Grass*. The titles of George's books demand lofty, eclectic groups of words with a mysterious sound: *Hymnen (Odes)*, *Pilgerfahrten (Pilgrimages)*, *Algabal*; *Die Bücher der Hirten und Preisgedichte, der Sagen und Sänge und der Hängenden Gärten* (*The Books of the Eclogues and Eulogies, of Legends and Lays and of the Hanging Gardens*); *Das Jahr der Seele* (*The Year of the Soul*); *Der Teppich des Lebens* (*The Tapestry of Life*); *Der Siebente Ring* (*The Seventh Ring*); *Der Stern des Bundes* (*The Star of the Covenant*); *Das Neue Reich* (*The Kingdom Come*).

The contrast of two worlds is already revealed behind these hieroglyphic book titles. From the beginning Whitman conceived his poetry as truly like green grass, which, sprouting, increases ever anew and endlessly. "I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven." Or "I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic" and means: Instinct and growth are the same everywhere. Nothing can more obviously give a new interpretation to Schiller's concept of the naive! The poetic Ego itself like green grass, producing verses like primeval growth; growing over everything, entwined in everything. And at the same time what Schiller characterizes in the sentence "his ideas are inspirations of a god" is true of him; *i.e.*, they are of surprising depth. And thus the image of sprouting grass

prophetically includes sprouting life, which forces its way out of death, out of graves:

It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men;
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
It may be you are from old people, and from women, and from
offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps;
And here you are the mothers' laps.²

We find these verses in the song "Walt Whitman" (1855), in which the poet sings of himself, in which the whole future cosmos of the leaves of grass is anticipated as the symbolic self, distributed in everything. The consciousness of the Ego, one can say, is here decreased and reduced to a total context of existence. So completely that the leaves of grass verses sing out boundless existence, which is always the same; each verse an individual one, and yet all the same. Changing voices of all in everything. That is the broad meaning of leaves of grass. That is why Whitman can introduce his leaves of grass with the verse:

One's-Self I sing—a simple, separate Person;
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-masse.³

This *Leaves of Grass* singer fills out his leaves of grass image by being nothing else but the naive mass-man, man of a new continent, of a new-grown feeling of universality, of a feeling of community, of a young cosmic abundance, rejoicing in its mass.

The titles of George's books are the coinages of a reflecting sense of form, which emphasizes distance and seeks out the eclectic. They are set up like tables, behind which begins a world in itself of beautiful form, an art for art's sake. They express the same thing that is expressed in the program of *Blätter für die Kunst*: "INTELLECTUAL ART is wanted, on the basis of the new manner of feeling and style—an art for art."⁴ Schiller⁵ had awarded the sentimental poet the "portrayal of the ideal." The *Hymnen* and *Pilgerfahrten*, the *Bücher der Hirten* call up ideal conditions. It is a romantic idealism which here erects its secret world of form, its world of dreams and miracles, its nobility in the blessing of the beautiful. The ideals of that current of the age, for which the name "Neo-Romanticism" arose around 1905. Just at that time, however, George's titles, without reducing the distance of the eclectic, already begin to move toward monumental simplicity: *Das Jahr der Seele*, *Der Siebente Ring*, *Der Stern des Bundes*. A stature-like dignity expresses itself, which is no longer so much concerned with beau-

tiful form, as with new tables of value. A Neo-Idealism, based more on a sense of form and a severity of form than on an enjoyment of form and a feeling for form; expressed in the slogans of the time—"Neo-Classicism" more than "Neo-Romanticism." While Whitman varies a single naive metaphor of existence in continual growth ("green grass"), the titles of George's books construct before us the course of a sentimental formation of the world. A formation of the world out of the idea, which retains symbolizing distance even when the reference to the poet's self is immediately obvious, as in *Jahr der Seele*.

He who, with Schiller, recognizes the sentimental poet as the one who, at bottom, is always on the way to lost nature will not be surprised that in *Stern des Bundes* George's powerful self approaches a stage in which, reflecting and in aphoristic severity, it seeks, like Whitman, an image of growth:

I sense accord in bloom and wilting,
And joy in all I live and do.⁹

But what a contrast! George's aphoristically severe nominal style: "Keim-Welke" (Bloom-Wilting), and Whitman's indefatigably varied abundance of images around the primeval experience of the Ego, growing like grass, anonymous, transforming itself into everything.

II

Each of the two poets preserves in memory the moment at which his poetic calling bursts forth so convulsively that it is felt as an act of initiation. Whitman portrays the moment exactly in the hymn "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." It is a song of remembrance, sung in 1860 at the height of first mastery. It goes back to childhood. He observes in the dunes along the sea a loving little pair of mocking-birds, the female on the nest. And suddenly he must share the infinite sorrow of the forlorn male whose mate has perished. Sympathetic sorrow rends his heart. Just at that moment words that give human sound and human meaning to the bird's cry of lamentation come streaming to him. Whitman feels this as the birth of his own poetic calling. The power of sympathy frees his voice for song; he feels it as the fatal juncture of his life:

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it mostly to me?
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping,

Now I have heard you,
Now in a moment I know what I am for—I awake,
And already a thousand singers—a thousand songs, clearer, louder
and more sorrowful than yours,
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me,
Never to die . . .
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what
there, in the night,
By the sea, under the yellow and sagging moon,
The messenger there aroused—the fire, the sweet hell within,
The unknown want, the destiny of me.⁷

The moment is so convulsive for the poet that the bird is transformed into a “demon” for him (the word *demon* is expressly added in 1867). It is the force of demonic Nature in the primitive sorrow of the creature that rends the heart of him, of the sympathizing man himself, and causes words to well up in him, words of infinite sympathy, out of a breast rent by sorrow, rent by fellow agony.

Around the early George, on the other hand, there is loneliness and self-chosen distance. He goes out alone into nature, and while he “exchanges words with ghosts” there, he experiences his poetic calling as a solemn “initiation,” through the kiss of the Muse. She appears to him like an angel out of the world of art of D. G. Rossetti, the “Pre-Raphaelite.” It is a pose strangely far from life that stamps the whole poem. A withdrawal from Nature, from the surrounding landscape into the inner view, until the initiation finds imaginative incarnation in the concluding verses:

This is the hour! Down the goddess gleams,
Her gauzy veils the colour of the moon,
Her lids are lowered with the weight of dreams,
She leans to you and offers you a boon.

Her mouth is trembling closer to your cheeks,
So pure you seem to her, so ripe for bliss,
That now she does not shun your hand which seeks
To turn her lips to yours and to your kiss.⁸

Everything is put artificially and artistically—from the veil of gauze to the position for the kiss. The “initiation” has congealed into an image, and the iambic rhythm is appropriate to this. The will to beautiful form lies like paralysis over this exalted moment of initiation, which is a self-imposed initiation. Where is there anything here comparable to the outburst of a “demon”?

We shall extend the outlook in both poets to their relationship to Nature in general. Nothing can illustrate Whitman's demonic feeling for Nature more clearly, more simply, and at the same time more sublimely than that song of the mocking-bird in the same hymn, that testimony of being shocked and moved by the sorrow of a living creature. Feeling everything, he dares to stammer human sounds in imitation of the song of sorrow:

Soothel! soothe! soothe!
 Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
 And again another behind, embracing and lapping, every one
 close,
 But my love soothes not me, not me.

Low hangs the moon—it rose late;
 O it is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O madly the sea pushes, pushes upon the land,
 With love—with love . . . ⁹

What rhythmic transformation! The Whitman mass-rhythm lyrically disciplined here, and yet soaring free. In sympathy with the sorrow of the bird, a cosmic feeling with surrounding Nature—the moon, the sea. Soaring into the soaring sorrow of the cosmos. The soaring of love, which is infinite even in sorrow. Such cosmic open-heartedness becomes the redeeming gift of Nature to the soul convulsed by sorrow. Indefatigably, in ever new waves of song, the poet sings out the lament of the bird. To the poet, however, is given what can not be felt by the little sorrow of the bird, to find the secret of the cosmos itself, the all-redeeming basic word that resounds to him alone from the endlessness of the sea, the word "Death." It is the ultimate climax. The poet, sympathizing with the living creature, convulsed by the demon bird, in complete surrender to the sympathizing cosmos, is carried along out of the sorrow of the bird into the primeval sorrow of the world, as it resounds in the roar of the sea.

Whereto answering, the sea,
 Delaying not, hurrying not,
 Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before day-
 break,
 Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word DEATH;
 And again Death—ever Death, Death, Death . . .

What Schiller¹⁰ says about the naive poet can be quoted here directly: "The object possesses him completely. His heart does not lie right under the surface like a base metal, but must be sought in the depths like gold. Like the godhead behind the structure of the universe, he stands behind his work . . ." And thus Whitman, the cosmic sympathizer, can not rest until his voice has become the voice of existence itself, with the clue to the secret of the world in it.

George's relationship to Nature is fundamentally different. In him, too, profound forces develop that call up the concept of the demonic; it is a kind of demonic non-feeling, an intended distance of feeling that represents the extreme contrast to Whitman's fellow-feeling. For what attracts George is just the dead, lifeless, Anti-Natural. For this, however, his imagination finds images that can only be considered as the outburst of a first Surrealism. In the domain of the figure of the horrible late Roman Emperor-Priest Al-gabal, intensified to the point of the unnatural, George paints a garden landscape that arises out of the same form of consciousness as Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*:

My garden requires no air and no sun,
The garden I built for my pondering,
Its birds are motionless flocks, and none
Ever has welcomed the advent of spring.

The trunks are of coal and of coal are the shoots,
The hedges and fields draw a scowling design,
A never harvested burden of fruits
Glitters like lava in groves of pine.¹¹

A reaction in every line against all imitative art, against the Naturalism of the age. Banished to the "Realm Below" by the poet. Magic Anti-Nature of entralling lifelessness. Until the concluding verse demands the impossible, in magic exorcism:

But when my fantasy conquered my gloom
I asked, as I pensively made my rounds:
How can I evoke you in sacred bounds,
Strange, and large, and sombre bloom?

An enigmatic symbolism. Whom does the "sombre bloom" mean? Gundolf¹² interprets it as the "sensually-dark sign of the mystery of procreation, of growth, which is no longer subject to perception and will, and without the conquest of which the dream of perfection is imperfect." A revealing sign, at the same time, of the inability of the surrealist to maintain his entralling magic of the lifeless Anti-

Natural. The last question raises the gloomy vision of the Realm Below as a powerful one, to which, however, the most profound thing, the creative unconscious, is denied. The sentimental poet, says Schiller,¹³ "leaves reality in order to rise to ideas and to master his material with free and independent action." In this way surrealistic pictures like Algabal's garden can arise. But then Schiller's conclusion applies only too easily. "Thus in the productions of the sentimental poet one will often ask about the object in vain," and thus he will fall into the "error of emptiness," for "a play of intellect without an object is nothing in esthetic judgment." These are conclusions that apply to every surrealistic spasm, even if, as in Europe today, the scale of values induces it. George's Algabal poem of 1892 has prepared the way here; it suggests, at the same time, that this surrealistic spasm has an undertone of unconscious despair and melancholy:

We never shall tremble in earthly distress,
We, who were born for the purple of thrones.¹⁴

Where the Anti-Natural spell has weakened, in the *Jahr der Seele* with its park landscape, the park like a "tomb" in the background, the melancholy bursts forth all the more unrestrainedly.¹⁵ "To spare you, I have let you guess askew/The reason why my sorrow is so deep." What dark forces they are that underlie the alienation from Nature with nameless sadness will appear more revealingly at another point.

III

Conversation with the unconscious has in both poets led to poems in which the same image is elaborated poetically. The contrasts become clear all the more sharply.

In Whitman's song of himself, "Walt Whitman," this primal song of the leaves of grass symbol, the fifth section presents something like a little myth of a meeting between the self and the soul. The conversation is carried on so passionately, that it is well to remember from the beginning that with the word *you* the poet is addressing not a beloved, but his own soul:

I mind how once we lay, such a transparent summer morning;
How you settled your head athwart my hips, and gently turn'd
over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my bare-stript heart,

And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth;
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own;
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
women my sisters and lovers;
And that a kelson of the creation is love . . .¹⁶

What permeates these verses with all-embracing passion of love (like the later "Children of Adam") is pure spiritual passion here, which bursts forth from the unconscious and embraces the whole world. The poet seeks an image for the most profound evocation of the soul, and finds only a very elemental one that can satisfy him—the plunging of the tongue into the bared heart. The surprising thing, however, is the completely undiscordant unity with which the conscious and the unconscious and the universal are felt to be fused into one. And the invocation of God for this process.

In George the third aphoristic poem in the second book of the *Stern des Bundes* is formed from the same basic image. Here the spiritual eros reaches out of the middle of the Maximin experience to souls that are to be united in the league:

On your breast where I can hear your heart beat,
Let me lay my mouth to suck the festered
Sores of former fevers, as a healing
Stone upon a wound extracts the venom.
When my hand takes yours, a current runs
Through your body, and you move untrammelled.
Sigh no more that turbid fumes which foul
Dreams have bred, torment your rallied spirit
Over and over again. They flame disbanded
In the conflagration of this passion.¹⁷

The same image of the most profound evocation of the soul; the mouth's breath plunging into the opened breast. But in place of that undiscordant feeling of God-All that links man and universe, George's poem shows a state of the interior of the soul, which is tortured by the suppressed vapors of dreams, by suppurating fevers, by wounds to the soul. Here we have, in contrast to young America, Europe, a seriously ill cultural soul, which needs healing. The old

fevers, suppurating convulsively in the soul, recall only too clearly that mortal wound of the age, which the sharpest philosophical mind of the time, Friedrich Nietzsche,¹⁸ laid bare with the word *Ressentiment*. *Ressentir*—to feel the afterpains in the soul from wounds that life has inflicted on us; the wound of mortal jealousy, as Scheler¹⁹ has X-rayed it, as spiritual auto-intoxication, as thirst for revenge, which has not worked its way out to the surface, and which turns inward and poisons itself. A disease of the age to which all those who are sentimental are exposed, all who have fallen from the naive structure of the cosmos, from the equilibrium, from the relationship between God and the cosmos. The Europe of the turn of the century rises up, with its spiritual burdens, impeded in all natural impulses of community. The individual is encapsulated within himself, exposed to the weight of the masses, who are smothering his cultural force. The same age that leads to psychoanalysis, to the increase in neurotics, in neuroses, that ushered in the Freudian theory²⁰ as a doctrine of salvation (around 1890, in Vienna at the same time that Whitman and George begin to have an influence).

The two poems gain their special significance against such a background. Whitman's passionately flooding cosmic feeling that links the conscious and the unconscious is, at the same time, the nameless mass-feeling, the yea-saying, endorsed by the spirit of the age, to the divine in all the forms of tension of the age. It is just in this, that Schiller's characterization of the naive poet is again fulfilled. "Nature has shown him the favor of always working as an undivided unity, of being an independent and perfect whole at every moment, and of portraying humanity in reality in accordance with its full capacity." George, who sets up the tables of aphorisms as magus-priest of the league of his own creation, reveals the whole tortured condition of the soul of the age in the symbolic meeting between the conscious mind of the magus and unconscious youth.

IV

With this we have reached a first point, a center of existence, from which the perspectives spread out. In Whitman's undiscordant cosmic feeling lies a key to his whole work. Here an optimism of progress, a yea-saying to the masses, to technology, to the technological development of the world under an ideally seen democracy establishes the fact that here the representative face of America emerges. A song of simplicity, which closes over the most enormous

contradictions. The greatness within it is not restrained by a preaching tone that celebrates the ideal of the mass in songs streaming forth immeasurably broad. What breaks through as greatness again and again is in the fanatically young, integral core, which, rushing along, fills itself with views of this felt age of the masses, and which, at the same time, advances prophetically into the future. There is a true core of faith in it, which gleams like a glowing sun from the center of each of these gigantic hymns, and is entirely permeated by the certainty that the unity experienced daily in the whirlpool of the whole is nothing but God Himself.

One of the sublimest, solemn Whitman confessions into the future, a true world vision that encompasses America as well as Europe, may stand here, at the same time, as a striking expression of Whitman's experience of God: a poem, "Years of the Modern," which first appeared in 1865, having arisen under the shock of the Civil War:

Years of the modern! years of the unperform'd!

Your horizon arises—I see it parting away for more august dramas;
I see not America only—I see not only Liberty's nation, but other
nations preparing;

I see tremendous entrances and exits—I see new combinations—I
see the solidarity of races;

I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's
stage;

(Have the old forces, the old wars, played their parts? are the acts
suitable to them closed?)

I see Freedom, completely arm'd, and victorious, and very
haughty, with Law on one side, and Peace on the other;

A stupendous Trio, all issuing forth against the idea of caste;

—What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?

I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions;

I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken;

I see the landmarks of European kings removed;

I see this day the People beginning their landmarks (all others
give way);

—Never were such sharp questions ask'd as this day;

Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God;

Lo! how he urges and urges, leaving the masses no rest;

His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere—he colonizes the
Pacific, the archipelagoes;

With the steam-ship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, the
wholesale engines of war,

With these, and the world-spreading factories, he interlinks all geography, all lands;
—What whispers are these, O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas?
Are all nations communing? Is there going to be but one heart to the globe?
Is humanity forming, en-masse?—for lo! tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim;
The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war;
No one knows what will happen next—such portents fill the days and nights;
Years prophetic! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce it, is full of phantoms;
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me;
This incredible rush and heat—this strange ecstatic fever of dreams, O years!
Your dreams, O year, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I sleep or wake!)
The perform'd America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me,
The unperform'd, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.²¹

The hymn surprises and overpowers through the prophetic impetus with which the collapse of the old Europe is foreseen, an Apocalyptic vision, which, with ingenious simplicity, clears the way for the picture of the future of World Democracy. In here casting himself unconditionally upon his ideals of the future, Whitman resembles that naive poet of Schiller's who "steps out of his nature and becomes sentimental merely to be poetic."²² In his imperturbable feeling of unity he succeeds in seeing present and future as one to such an extent that one grows directly out of the other. It is just this that gives the solemn vision its real impetus. The rhetoric of the repetitions unites in a world-age rhythm that is like a flood and ebb. Mass style reveals itself as grand style, as a style that embraces universes. In the midst of it, however, is the jubilant cry of simplicity that supports the whole thing and joins it together: "Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God." The most ordinary the divine, the average man, the mass-man bearer of the secret of the universe itself. In this faith present and future form a seamless joint for Whitman.

On the other hand, George now becomes the voice of the aging, tired West. Yet in giving sound to this voice, he preserves the advantage of the sentimental poet in that "he completes a defective object with himself and, by his own power, moves himself from his confined state to a state of freedom."²³ He succeeds in a freedom of judgment as to form that raises the poetic object to the dignity of a revealing symbol. The melancholy of the *Jahr der Seele* solidifies in the symbol of dying religion:

You reached the hearth, but dwindled

To cinders was the glow,

The moon was all that kindled

The earth with deathly hue.

Your listless fingers crumble

The ashes. If you strain

And grope in them, and fumble,

Will light return again?

See, how the moon consoles you

With soothing gait,

Leave the hearth—she tells you—

It has gotten late.²⁴

As depressing as is the content, so masterful and sacerdotal is the form. In contrast to the broadly flowing plain-speaking of Whitman, here everything in the poem is image, molded mystery. We experience a mystic rite. We are in the temple. The simplicity has something sacral about it; every action acquires a symbolic hidden meaning. "You reached the hearth"—"Leave the hearth." The three-beat line gloomily hammers in the futility of human searching: "It has gotten late." An unutterable sadness diffuses itself. A culture grown tired still seeks in vain to light the hearth fire of the old faith. "That is true symbolism," says Goethe, "when the particular represents the more general, not as a dream and shadow, but as a vital and immediate revelation of the unfathomable." What can be simpler than this "particular"—the reaching the hearth fire, the straining, the leaving. The poet raises it to the level of the sacral, only through the choice and combination of words. He makes it a sign that reveals a hidden meaning within itself, a symbol, a revealing symbol, and what is shown is the depressing vision of the spiritual decline of the West. What Spengler put into thoughts immediately before the World War is seen here as an image by the poet a decade earlier.

The continents part. Walt Whitman's America, the voice of the mass-man, naive and without a history, with its gaze to the future, with faith in life, unconquerably young, with the pathos of the democracy that joins the peoples. George's Europe, facing backwards, paralyzed by doubt, skeptical and tired, but with the symbolic gaze of old age, which penetrates into the depths of form, an eclectic, aristocratic form that rejects the masses, and speaks to all only through symbol, or rather only to the few who are open to such esoteric symbolism.

V

The level of form that we have thus reached, however, requires its special consciousness. Here the sentimental poet, as Schiller sees him, has the advantage over the naive one. For "the favor of Nature," to which the naive poet owes most, also links him to the object, and he runs the risk, in Schiller's formula, "of becoming common Nature." The freedom for the "greater object,"²⁵ on the other hand, remains for the sentimental poet in his distance from Nature.

Whitman seems to a considerable extent to have fallen prey to the danger of becoming common Nature. We may limit ourselves to a few characteristic judgments. Emerson, who had greeted the *Leaves of Grass* of 1855 as the "American poem," later wrote: "I expect him to make the songs of the Nation, but he seems to be contented to make the inventories."²⁶

Those broadly flowing waves of verse, in which, hearing, seeing, and praising, he seizes all the things on earth that are linked by the electric telegraph, correspond to Whitman's naive cosmic astonishment. So immeasurable is his astonished joy that he piles up pages and pages of observations like a newspaper reporter. And it is well-known that he originally aimed at becoming a popular orator, and that the rhetorical in him was only gradually converted into the poetic. It was just in this way that what Emerson calls an "inventory" arose, a monotony of the quantitative, in which the mass-like quality of the emerging mass-age is reflected in the most naive way. One need only open to a hymn like "Salut au Monde!":

What do you hear, Walt Whitman?

I hear the workman singing, and the farmer's wife singing;
I hear in the distance the sounds of children, and of animals
early in the day;
I hear . . .²⁷

There follow twenty-six lines of verse beginning with "I hear"; there follow over one hundred lines of verse beginning with "I see." And yet in just such a piling-up there is a monumental simplicity which in itself becomes style-forming. What gives it dignity, this massy style of untiring repetitions, is just that thundering monotone of a mass-rhythm, which wants nothing else behind all the mass multiplicity than the cosmic one, the eternal.

At the same time there is certainly no lack of tricks of simplicity to call up the illusion of the winged world traveler, for whom the constant change of impressions is the breath of life and the aura of an all-embracing confidence in the world. Hence the famous introduction to the "Song of the Open Road":

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.²⁸

The victorious unconcern of the world traveler, who does not care a bit about any convention, really permeates every one of his great songs. Besides, it arouses the impression all the more that the piled-up repetitions, this massy style of quantity, appear to him as the form of existence of the things themselves, used only as the voice through which the mass-age booms. Thus the famous great songs acquire something of the eternal roaring of the sea, by which the inspired singer allows himself to be borne along in the rhythm of flood and ebb. And he himself interprets this whispering flood as the voices of all men, the voices of "all men, all times and lands," the voice of democracy itself. But is the danger of "becoming common Nature" entirely prevented by this? Can the fact that "the material at times exercises a blind power over susceptibility" be negated in this way? "No genius of the naive class," says Schiller²⁹ "has entirely avoided this cliff." Does Whitman, who is readily open to every expression of street-jargon, of colloquial phrases, of mass-idiom in order to escape the conventional and to find the soul of the people, attain symbolic stature by this?

It is just here that one may admire the naive accuracy with which Whitman assembles all his poetry in the image of *Leaves of Grass*. In the leaves of grass image he embraces his image of life, the sprouting green of his boyish poetry, like all those creations of the quantitative style, an endlessly and rankly growing prairie field of grasses, one like the other, with the climaxes of the *Calamus* songs as giant sedge. And yet this image always remains really only a

metaphor, an emotional image of the soul, which with unlimited rhetorical pathos transforms all Whitman songs into leaves of grass. Emotional metaphors, however, are not yet symbolic stature. We turn to the opposite world of the sentimental poet, for whom everything that enters into his form is transformed into stature. To formalize, a style of eclectic quality running counter to Whitman's quantity.

Now here in George we meet a poetic form that can really be placed only antipodal to the leaves of grass metaphor style of the poet of the masses and quantities. What George erects at the height of his art are "statues" in the true sense, figures of a pure world of art, clear classical consolidations into stature, in which, in cool and perfect form, the particular represents the general in the "type" or even in the "prototype," as "representations of the ideal." But, at the same time, these statues are created with such a passion for form, with such a passion for mystery, one might say, that the clear creation of form-stature is filled with a kind of word-magic that is kept in the background, as if the poet wanted to compensate the dead religious emotion of the age with the art world of his statues, in a revealing symbolic profundity.

The introductory poem in the *Teppich des Lebens*, which itself symbolizes the name of the whole volume of verse, summarizes George's art at this stage so perfectly that this one poem becomes exemplary not only for George, but for the European art of the age. What George describes here with masterfully successful language is a real Oriental prayer rug, with its mysterious ornamentation. But while he has this magic tapestry arise before us, it becomes the background for the magic of art in general, indeed, even more of a background for the image of life itself, as George the magus interprets it for us (1900):

Here men are oddly meshed with beasts and plants
Which silken fringes frame to harmonies,
Cerulean crescents in arrested dance
Are scored and trimmed with silver galaxies.

The arabesque is crossed with barren lines,
The single parts are tangled and at strife,
And the enigma of the snared remains
Until, one night, the fabric leaps to life.

The patterned boughs begin to stir and veer,

The creatures locked in arc and square come out
Before the knotted tassels, limned and clear,
And bring the answer that dissolves your doubt.

It is not at your beck, is not for each
Accustomed day, and not what guilds could share,
And never for the many, nor through speech
It comes incarnate rarely to the rare.³⁰

A world congealed into hieroglyphics, which can only be dissolved by a magic word, a word never accessible to the average man. The concluding words seem as if spoken directly against Whitman: It is “never for the many, nor through speech . . .” George’s art, George’s interpretation of life has nothing in common with the masses, the magic of its “form” calls up only the “rare men.” Separation, selection, beauty is the demonically imposed fate, to be borne proudly. This art is aristocratic to the last word.

VI

The Whitman-George juxtaposition has thus reached a critical stage, which corresponds to the radical contrast of the currents in Germany around the turn of the century, Naturalism and Symbolism. Schiller’s formulae of the naive and the sentimental suffice for the scaffolding and protect us from evaluating one current against the other. The dangers they indicate have only been unusually aggravated toward a crisis. The monotony of Whitman’s reportorial style makes clear the “blind power of the material over susceptibility”; George’s statues, with all their perfection of form, approach in their detachment from life what Schiller calls “the eccentric” in the sentimental poet.³¹ The emergence of the brutality of the masses, on the one side, paralyses of the symbolizing power because of the *Ressentiment* of an age, on the other side. Yet Schiller’s formulae include the claim that the common poetic foundation can not be shaken, that therefore even Whitman and George remain comparable on the poetic level as exponents of the naive and the sentimental.

It appears that Whitman can not be comprehended by the word *Naturalism*, that, rather, his kind of Naturalism goes back to the American nature, which in casting off European, traditional forms seeks its own new form. And it appears that George, in the totality of his work, can be just as little comprehended by the word

Symbolism, the esoteric significance of which was, rather, destroyed with the first World War. Fate willed that both poets, Whitman as well as George, went through two equal shocks, by which they were struck to the core, Eros and War. Thus there are stages of development that run parallel, and a community of the poetic that seeks its expression in the symbolic figure.

Nowhere does Whitman become more magnificently Pan-like than where he sings of the universal power of love. He sings of it with brutal nakedness as the most powerful divine miracle of creation. Even the *Leaves of Grass* of 1855 contains the hymn "I sing the Body electric." It is understandable that in puritan America Emerson made energetic efforts to turn the poet's mind from this, but in vain. For Whitman himself, as for Adam in Paradise, Eros dawned too primordially as a divine power. But what he sings of is the miracle of sex, as it falls to everyone, the mass experience—Love. And he sings of it with all the pathos of the mass-like, of the purely sexual, as the procreative and the productive. Therefore there is nothing sultry about it. It is for him the sustaining power of the cosmos itself, the creative power that penetrates everything, that culminates in human procreation. The style of quantity is open to widely soaring metaphors, to cosmic coinage:³² "Ebb stung by the flow, and flow stung by the ebb . . ." "Bridegroom night of love . . ." Above all, however, the rhetorical pathos remains definitive. And yet even the song of 1855 is surprising in its creative agitation as well as in its stride toward just what Goethe, the great naive poet,³³ calls the "symbolic object" (Part 3):

I know a man, a common farmer—the father of five sons;
And in them were the fathers of sons—and in them were the
fathers of sons.

This man was of wonderful vigor, calmness, beauty of person . . .³⁴

What Whitman sketches here is the paragon of the paterfamilias, of the octogenarian, surrounded by sons, daughters, and grandchildren, prototype of the proud, procreative man in his domain. Also a "statue," only raised up directly out of reality and revealed for all. An example of Goethe's definition as he coined it during his residence in Frankfurt in 1797: "Eminent cases, which exist in a characteristic multiplicity as representatives of many others, include a certain totality in themselves, summon a certain series, arouse similar and foreign things in my mind, and thus lay claim to a certain unity and universality from without as well as from within."

Whitman's step from the Adam songs to the Calamus songs is already a step from the quantitative on to the particular. The intensification of love to a universal impulse, which reveals itself to masculine friendship just as passionately as to the love of woman, is a withdrawal from the mass-like quality of pure sex and a demand for a meeting of souls. The poet now warns those who read his poems and rush toward him:

Nor will my poems do good only—they will do just as much evil,
perhaps more;

For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times
and not hit—that which I hinted at;

Therefore release me, and depart on your way.³⁵

So much the more enthusiastically does Whitman, in the intensification of his leaves of grass image to calamus, seek a symbol-containing reality, capable of sustaining whole poems. From the metaphor "scented herbage of my breast"³⁶ he devises a whole hymn, which sings across the gulf of love and death. Striding through the real prairie-grass,³⁷ he calls up an image (spiritual corresponding); sprouting comradeship "demand the blades to rise of words, acts, beings." Plucking real grasses in the spring he convokes the spirits of friends, distributing the calamus root among them,³⁸ "the token of comrades." Or he interweaves "roots and leaves of grass" and everything else that Nature offers with thoughts of love. A whole series of short poems strives for symbolic fusion of a universal image with the basic emotional mood. He still does not get rid of the pathos of the orator, however. The short poem that constructs democracy out of the love of comrades represents a high point of calamus-love. The pathos is symbolized around a metaphor that grows out of the calamus image:

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon;
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies;

I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks;

By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.

For you these, from me, O Democracy, to serve you, ma femme!
For you! for you, I am trilling these songs,
In the love of comrades,
In the high-towering love of comrades.³⁹

The great emotion is transformed into a “song,” borne entirely by the “naive element of the mind,” an ideal of simplicity that makes the love of a comrade the center of creation, organically growing, electric, putting soul into everything. The pathos of democracy, sung into the hearts of all.

George’s early Eros knows no songs of Adam, he hides behind the landscape images of the *Jahr der Seele*. Autumn images of the park like a “tomb” take up the melancholy mood of the lonely man who conjures up his intangible *you* in the image, in the renouncing image:

Then let us conceal what defied us
And turn to felicity, for
The one thing which is denied us
Is walking together once more.⁴⁰

Then, however, that same universally powerful Eros, who sustains Whitman’s calamus songs, strikes the poet in the youth Maximin. He draws seven rings around the middle of the temple, in which he raises up Maximin as his self-chosen god. The sentimental poet as the magus who dares to give back the lost god to the sentimental age. Whitman’s “song” of the warmly streaming heart contrasts with George’s poem, which, as if hammered in bronze, raises the “greater object” to the exalted:

To some you are a child,
To some a friend, to me
The god whom I divined
And tremblingly adore.

You came at last when sick
With waiting, weary of
My prayers, I began
To lose myself in night.

I knew you by the beam
Which flowed into my dark,

The step to which the seed
Replied with sudden bloom.⁴¹

The magic of art stamps a god into the godless age. That is the meaning of the monumental declaration; the *you* becomes stature. Rhymeless, with three beats, the line forms the article of faith: "The god whom I divined." Thus "reality rises to the ideal," in the most compact way. Perfect art turns into magic religion. *Der Siebente Ring* and *Der Stern des Bundes* move about this center. Maximin's death is raised to a world event—the disappearance of God. George's Eros only comes to know himself completely in his mourning for God. Nature penetrates only into the magic circle, congealed to dead Nature, to a monument of mourning:

The forest shivers.

In vain it clothed itself in leaves of spring,
The field your root made consecrate is numb
And cold without the sun you bring.

* * * * *

The sound of saplings cracking,
Stem after stem—what now will fall?
The early green is growing worn,
The grass, so lately sprung, already shorn,
No bird sings, only frosty winds are clacking
And then the axes call.⁴²

Violently decolorized Nature, symbol of an imperious interpretation, under the mourning magus, which causes the universe to mourn too. Vengeance, one can say, that the magus, robbed of his God, takes upon life. And it is vengeance, too, that George, as judge of the times, takes upon the godless age in the aforementioned "poems of our times": "You lost the noblest thing—blood!" The founder of the order, however, chooses as his model the Templars, the ascetic knights who wear the cross; but called up for the act of deliverance of the age. Only by force can they compel Mother Earth to serve them, to realize Maximin's ideal:

Submissively she plies her work afresh:
Turns flesh to god, embodies god in flesh.⁴³

The magus-priest then founds the new order of the cult of Maximin with the tables of the law of the *Stern des Bundes*. The poems, unrhymed aphoristic verses, congeal into the demand for absolute art. They found the cultist congregation of the Beautiful God. Whit-

man's wandering love for his comrades finds its well-disciplined counterpart in the meeting of magus and disciples, but from what tortured depths:

On your breast where I can hear your heart beat,
Let me lay my mouth to suck the festered
Sores of former fevers, . . .⁴⁴

In the magus-priest is drawn Schiller's⁴⁵ violent idealist, who forgets all too easily "that the trunk is also affected if the roots fail." The poet-realist, for whom the love for his comrades broadens to democracy, is opposed by the magic founder of an order.

VII

At the height of their lives and of their poetry both poets are surprised by the world event of a national war, carried along into its overwhelming fate, and forced into decisions from which they only then gain complete maturity. Whitman is forty-two, George forty-eight, when war hits them. Whitman feels the outbreak of war in 1861 as civil war, which tears his heart to pieces, which tears his beloved American democracy to pieces. George, in the first World War of 1914-1918, suffers the destruction of a youth for which Maximin had been the sign of the zodiac.

This inner maturing through war takes place in three stages. In both men the visionary presentiment comes first. Whitman is overwhelmed by his sympathetic heart. George is held fast like a figure by a plastic image.

Whitman's vision of grief, a short poem, flooded with pathos:
I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon
all oppression and shame;
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with
themselves, remorseful after deeds done;
I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children, dying,
neglected, gaunt, desperate;
I see the wife misused by her husband—I see the treacherous se-
ducer of young women;
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love, attempted
to be hid—I see these sights on the earth;
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny—I see martyrs
and prisoners;
I observe a famine at sea—I observe the sailors casting lots who
shall be kill'd, to preserve the lives of the rest;

I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons
 upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;
 All these—All the meanness and agony without end, I sitting,
 look out upon,
 See, hear, and am silent.⁴⁶

Whitman bobs up as out of the eternal stream of life, filled to overflowing with sorrow. In the midst of the unutterable grief of everyday life the image of battle also appears to him. The surprising thing is the darkening of the world, quite unusual for his optimistic view of life.

In *Stern des Bundes* in 1914 George paints one of the first aphoristic poems as an expressed presentiment of the World War:

Above the silent town a streak of blood!
 And then a storm exploded from the darkness,
 And through spasmotic gusts I heard the trampling
 Of hosts, first dim then near, the clash of iron.
 And proud and threatening rang a thrice divided
 Metallic call, and I was overwhelmed
 With rage and strength, and yet I felt a shudder
 As if a sword sank flat upon my head.
 A quicker beat, and faster marched the columns,
 And more and more battalions, and the selfsame
 Stridor of fanfares. Can this be the last
 Rebellion of the gods above the land?⁴⁷

The plasticity of language is perfect; the sublime of the great historical moment shines down upon every sorrow with the thrill of grandeur.

Thus prepared, both poets then experience war. Whitman, as the war drags on, goes to Washington, to the hospitals. Here he pours forth his heart's strength, helping, healing, loving, for years, to the point of exhaustion. His hair turns gray, and the stroke that afflicts him in 1873 ushers in his old age. It is in these war years that the whole reality of America really appears to the singer of democracy. What he experiences in the fighting, suffering, dying youth becomes poetry for him ("Drum-Taps"). The pathos of the orator is absorbed by the suffering of the war, which forces its way in with its realities. Whitman's will to the grand style has found the grand material, the grand object, in which everything involuntarily becomes symbolic. He becomes so fearlessly realistic that for years he can find no publisher. He avoids what the publishers want, the

poetic cliché. Completely without violence his sympathetic heart finds the sorrow silently flooding through the reality of war to be the innermost meaning. Thus the gloomy "March in the ranks hard-prest," with its glance at the emergency dressing-station in the church, which they march past. The "vigil strange," the watch the poet keeps over a fallen youth. The path of the dresser through the hospital, from one man to the other. Here, too, mass-rhythm reflects a mass-event, but each individual differently under the helping hand, and each one is symbolic of them all, but through the cruelty of suffering:

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,
But a day or two more—for see, the frame all wasted already, and
sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sicken-
ing, so offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me, holding the tray
and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out;
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand—(yet deep in my
breast a fire, a burning flame).⁴⁸

George's war is no civil war, it is a war of the whole nation. In a deepest layer of his being the magus-priest of the Maximin cult feels himself linked to this his people. As early as the *Stern des Bundes* he celebrates Maximin with the line: "The essence of the people's sacred youth." He himself, as a judge of the times, had begun his last poem of our times: "I am your conscience, I the voice pervading . . ." What attitude does he now take toward the war? Entirely the attitude of the "violent idealist." He withdraws from the popular enthusiasm of the August days of 1914, but in 1917 he raises his voice with the power of the judge of the times—"Der Krieg" (The War), as the "hermit on the hill." It is a kind of didactic poem, twelve unrhymed stanzas of twelve lines each. A stern, unyielding work, *sui generis*. Probably closest to that which Schiller⁴⁹ calls the "punishing satire," which "attains poetic freedom by going over into the sublime." Satire also understood in Schiller's sense of that "which contrasts reality as a flaw with the ideal as the highest

reality." George proceeds from the ideal of a pure Germany; his expression is surveying, judging reflection. Thus a Cassandra cry against the age arises, surpassing even as an act of courage. The punishing satire is intensified to a prophet's condemnatory anger. What Whitman experiences with a shocked heart gives George the angry images for the ethos he wants to hammer in. The suffering of war is painted as a merciless judgment of the technique of war:

You shall not cheer. No rise will mark the end,
But only downfalls, many and inglorious.
Monsters of lead and iron, tubes and rods
Escape their maker's hand and rage unruly.
Who saw his comrade crushed to pulp and fragments,
Who lived the life of vermin in the broken
And desecrated earth, must laugh with hatred
At speeches once heroic, now deceitful.
The ancient god of battles is no more.
And in decay a fevered world is sickening
Toward death. The only ichors that are sacred
Are those which, still unstained, are spent in floods.⁵⁰

What this half-century of war technique that lies between Whitman and George means probably becomes clearest here. Whitman is still naive in suffering that is capable of being felt. George's age has experienced the horror of drumfire. The sentimental poet understands what Nietzsche discovered as the spiritual poison of *Ressentiment*, as the universal disease of the age. The formulae he coins are of timelessly eternal force:

The ancient god of battles is no more.
And in decay a fevered world is sickening
Toward death.⁵¹

And in other places:

... when its gods have died a people dies.
And offering increases not in wicked age.

But the grandeur of the poem rises above the pathos of the condemnation, opposes the universal disease, takes the war as the purifying storm, and unintentionally it sounds as if it were sung against Whitman's America hymns, when at the end George praises venerable old Europe, with Germany in the midst of it:

And where the radiant Mother of Caucasians
Who are embroiled and vicious now, first showed

Her real unchanging face, O land, still hiding
So great a promise that it cannot fall!⁵²

Thus the poets shocked by war now meet on a new level, the slogans "Naturalism-Symbolism" fall away, the Realist and the Idealist appear definitely. But the manner in which each one of them dares to step out toward the great mythical figures, in whom reality is deepened to eternal enigma, remains characteristic. The enormous suffering of war calls up for both the same figure of the great Conqueror of Suffering, who has shaped the Christian West over a millennium and keeps it united, the figure of Christ. But what expression they find for it, in that the naive and the sentimental poet are unerringly differentiated.

Whitman, who now avoids any poetic transformation, and only permits to flow into words what the reality of war brings him with bitter severity, finally is open to the metaphysical impulse in a poem ("A Sight in Camp"). He passes three dead men, an old man, a child-youth, and finally a youth-man, struck down in the prime of life, with perfect serenity in his dead face. Just then the awe of the entirely different in the most usual overwhelms him:

Then to the third—a face nor child, nor old, very calm, as of
beautiful yellow-white ivory;
Young man, I think I know you—I think this face of yours is the
face of the Christ himself;
Dead and divine, and brother of all, and here again he lies.⁵³

Once more we admire the genius of simplicity. Only the simplest expression is able to convince that here the miracle has become real, that this dead man is really Christ.

George's didactic poem calls up the same Christ figure in the last strophe. His eclectic art lacks only one thing, the genius of simplicity:

Who hung upon the Tree of Weal cast off
The pallor of pale souls and vies in frenzy . . .
. . . Secretly Apollo leans
On Baldur . . .⁵⁴

The eclectic paraphrase weakens; it has a literary effect. The piling-up of Gods, Dionysus, Apollo, Baldur, also pulls the figure of Christ into the bookish world, the non-obligatory one. George's ethos of the future, "Youth calls up the gods," loses its youthful force.

VIII

Both poets, however, attain their greatest maturity only after the war, under the continuing shock of the war. It falls to both of them to become real voices of the people. They both meet in the perfection of the symbolic figure. But again in the polarity of the naive and the sentimental poet. Whitman only intensifies what the war has brought him, the "symbolic object"; unaffectedly, as did national poetry itself at one time, he finds the representative national figure in the grand material. George, in a sublime interpretation, coincides with the national will in the portrayal of the ideal.

Whitman's poem arose in 1865, right after the assassination of President Lincoln, and in his memory, "President Lincoln's Burial Hymn."⁵⁵ It can be characterized as the high-point of "Drum-Taps," from which the poet took it; it can also be praised as the high-point of the Calamus songs. It became Whitman's most famous poem, the representative American poem. The classic psalm of national mourning and national love for the "dearest man." Whitman was later to read this poem every year on the anniversary of Lincoln's death and also give the memorial address. Hindemith has honored it with a composition.

Whitman's entry is that of the old folk-song, a Nature entry:
When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd—and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Schiller's essay on naive and sentimental poetry begins: "There are moments in our lives when we dedicate . . . a kind of love and a kind of moving regard for Nature, merely because it is Nature . . . We love the quiet, creative life, the calm production out of itself . . ." It is the nobility of the naive poet never to be withdrawn from harmony with Nature. Whitman's mourning for the beloved departed is felt from the beginning as universal mourning, in which all of Nature shares. The motif of the blooming lilac, of the drooping star will run through the song of mourning as the constant sympathizing mourning of Nature and as consolation. And a third motif will join it, the song of the mocking-bird, that sorrowful lament of the forlorn male through which the child once became conscious of the poetic demon. The song of the mocking-bird will take a central position in the poet's hymns as the most painful paean of death. And once more he will dare to imitate the voice of the bird with the human voice, under the more profound universal shock of the death of the President.

Meanwhile, however, the coffin of the departed moves solemnly through all the states day and night. Suddenly we are in the mass-age, the mourning becomes national mourning, and Whitman's broad, flowing rhythm absorbs the mass effects in the lofty dignity of his funeral song, unobtrusively symbolic around the symbolic event. Lofty simplicity is the basic mood here, open to all impressions. Mass-rhythm, nationally symbolic in every line:

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night, with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags, with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veil'd women,
standing,
With processions long and winding, and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit—with the silent sea of faces, and
the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising
strong and solemn;
With all the mournful voices of the dirges, pour'd around the
coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—Where amid
these you journey,
With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang;
Here! coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

The lofty dignity of mourning surrounds the silent journey. Every sober single procession deepens it and gives weight to its meaning. The poet, like a bell, swings in accompaniment to the impressions, to the sprig of lilac, to the Western star, to the song of the mocking-bird; to what all feel in their love for the departed, to the broad wave of mourning of all America. Finally, the mood of mourning concentrates for him like a cloud over the landscape, a "long, black shadow," and with the unconcern of the folk-poet he gives it allegorical form:

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle, as with companions, and as holding the
hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night, that talks not . . .

It is allegory of medieval simplicity to gain revealing depth of symbol by splitting into "knowing about death" and the "thought of death." Whitman's feeling of comradeship as a primeval understanding with the world reveals this depth to him. At the same time, it brings him the song of the mocking-bird as the innermost voice of Nature herself, the ghostly voice of Death. In the song of the mocking-bird redeeming Death is revealed as the savior. "Come, lovely and soothing Death," praise to the Universal Mother who frees us in death. A song of consolation to the whole nation in its mourning. Consolation even beyond the terrors of death in battle and the horrors of war. Consolation to the mothers; it is not the fallen who suffer, only the mothers who mourn for them suffer.

Here war songs and calamus songs have fused in the image of Death as consoling companion, deliverer, and redeemer. But he who most profoundly represents this consolation, the silent man in the coffin, around whom national mourning unites all America, remains as the invisible center in the great song of mourning, as if spared; his influence is invisible in the deathly silence of his coffin journey, present only in the polyphonic mourning voices. Only the concluding song, in the last restrained verses, gives him the eternal dignity that befits him:

Yet each I keep, and all, retrievements out of the night;
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star, with the countenance full
of woe,
With the lilac tall, and its blossoms of mastering odor;
With the holders holding my hand, nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine, and I in the midst, and their memory ever I
keep—for the dead I loved so well;
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands . . . and this
for his dear sake;
Lilac and star and bird, twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines, and the cedars dusk and dim.

What a change from the popular orator, from the booming preacher of his own self to the symbolist poet, for whom all the effects of his song of the masses are quietly objectified around the one national figure, who himself only penetrates the whole as an invisible power, the power of a wonderful comrade, a man of the people, as he should be, to whom the greater comrade, Death, subordinates him-

self in mourning that penetrates the whole universe. Imperceptibly the journey of the coffin through the states of America becomes the symbolic homeward journey into the heart of the mourning nation and of Nature mourning in sympathy, as a revealing symbol, in whose dark background stands the enigma of death itself, in a deep understanding with all of existence.

George, like Whitman, is also led to a final maturity by mourning for the dead. It is the fallen of his Maximin-youth for whom he is mourning. It takes place in a few elegiac aphorisms, once even in a poem with the frightening title "Einem jungen Führer im ersten Weltkrieg" (To a Young Leader in the First World War), as if the second were already in sight for the poet in 1919. But then it is the collapse of German honor in 1919, the grief for the millions who died in vain that puts the poet into a state of critical bewilderment and mourning. The answer of the idealist is a vision that embraces the whole nation for the first time. It is just in this that it becomes comparable with Whitman's Lincoln hymn. It, too, speaks to the whole nation, with the profundity of a revelatory meaning. Schiller's⁵⁸ words can be applied to both of them: "Only to the genius is it given to be still at home outside the known and to extend Nature without going beyond it." It is just this that is the highest achievement of the revealing symbol. The simplicity with which Whitman's song of national mourning takes up the great object and exalts it to the symbolic can not, of course, be granted to his sentimental antipode. With all the restless magic power of the idealist George puts his vision into a stormy twilight; it is just in this that he finds the *chairois* of the hour for his nation, which has been thrown completely out of joint. A vision of the future, and in its depths, too, the enigma of death grows dark. Only it is not the death of the one in which a nation finds itself; it is the death of the millions of the World War comprehended and called up as mythic unity. Dead who rise up out of the depths of death and demand:

When these generations are purged of dishonour
 And hurl from their shoulders the shackles of bondage
 And feed in their vitals the hunger for virtue,
 Then flashes of blood will illumine the millions
 Of graves of the fallen, then thundering armies
 Will ride over clouds and the terror of terrors,
 The third of the tempests will sweep through the country:
 The dead turning homeward.

When men of this nation no longer are cowards
 Or weaklings, but feel their vocation and mission,
 Their hearts will decipher the message of heaven,
 In dread beyond measure. Their hand will be lifted,
 Their lips will be tuned to the homage of honour,
 The flag of the king, the legitimate symbol
 Will fly through the dawn and be lowered in praise of
 The hallowed, the heroes!⁵⁷

A single, grandiose "representation of the ideal" in Schiller's sense. "Approach to an infinite grandeur," the enigma of the future wrapped in horror. In the middle, stand the armies of the dead as symbolic bearers. No national break-up without these demonic forces. Every step into the future thus becomes crepuscular. "Unutterable horror" is indissolubly mixed into everything. There will be no purification of national honor without respect for the armies of the dead, without the twilight of the demonic forces locked up in them. George, the old magus-priest, did not lay aside his magic wand even in this vision of the national army of the dead. But his magic is no longer for the chosen few, in the mysterious weave of tapestry; it is for the whole nation. He himself feels one with it in its need, in its demonic unrest. And he feels himself one with the dead, as with the living. This produces the unique grandeur and dignity. A national magus, in the service of the dead to the living. Old myths rise up—Wotan's wild chase; old symbols—the king's standard.

Whitman could call upon Nature for consolation; he could conquer the bitterness of death in the profundity of the all-embracing feeling of comradeship, the ghostly voice of the bird could sing him the paean of consoling death. George's vision is of an apocalyptic kind, in the area far from Nature. The summoned dead do not console, they demand and frighten while they purify. "The naive poet is powerful through the art of limitation," says Schiller,⁵⁸ "the sentimental, through the art of the infinite."

IX

We have brought both poets to the point where they meet most purely on the poetic level, in the revealing symbol. They remain opposed to each other; the naive realist, the sentimental idealist. Each one brings his nourishing soil with him; Whitman the new continent with its naive cosmic joy, its enthusiasm for technology, the mass age, democracy. George the old cultural soil of Europe

with all its tensions, psychological conflicts and complexes, with the whole threatened state of its people. Both will not permanently preserve that moment of shock after the war, both fall back upon their everyday life again; Whitman on the indolence of the quantitative style, George on his esoteric circle. Yet one thing remains for them in common, with increasing age, the growing symbolic view of old age.

Here we have once more a contrast of both that has common, comparable features. Both are led to the same symbol of light, in which they embrace divine omnipotence.

The great poem of Whitman's old age is the "Prayer of Columbus." Immediately after a stroke in 1873 confronted his soul with the helplessness of the human creature, the sixty-four year old poet wrote the poem. (It appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, March 1874.) He feels himself one with the old discoverer of America, as he lies on the beach, shipwrecked, defenseless, paralyzed, and prays to God. All Whitman's passion for God and life plunges into this symbolic figure, and what arises is a monologue, a hymn of prayer, in which rhetoric and symbolism fuse effortlessly. Like Job he stands under the blows of fate, bent, but imperturbable in his faith. And thus it is Biblical force, the power of the images and words of the Biblical psalms, of which this confession of Whitman's old age reminds us. At the same time, the America that Columbus discovered is permeated involuntarily with the spiritual cosmos of America, which Whitman presented to his people to the glory of God. We shall limit ourselves to the place in which the passion for God is intensified to the hymn of light:

One effort more—my altar this bleak sand:
 That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
 With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
 (Light rare, untellable—lighting the very light!
 Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages!)
 For that, O God—be it my latest word—here on my knees,
 Old, poor, and paralyzed—I thank thee.⁵⁹

It is the old light symbol of mysticism, God's sun, which illuminates the soul. The final phrase receives it once more as a miracle from the divine hand that has taken the bandage from his eyes. Light that kindles the inner light of the soul.

Such naive passion, which appeals directly to God in the light, can not be counted on in George. The poet of the *Das Neue Reich* has

withdrawn into his severe style. But in his last poems he surprises us with a simplicity of the view of old age, which is open to primal phenomena. A late poem of 1928 sings of "Das Licht" (The Light) :

We grieve when you deprive us of your favour
And turn to others who are given more
On evenings when your essence weaves a savour
Around our spirit yearning to adore.

We should be fools to let our hatred touch you,
When often with your blaze you threaten blight,
We should be children if we tried to clutch you—
Because you shine for every one, sweet light!¹⁰

It is not the simplicity of the naive poet, not granted through the "favor of Nature." Even the unsimple sentence structure, the many conditional clauses indicate that; it is intellectual simplification, which Schiller¹¹ assigns to the perfect idyll, as the third species of sentimental poetry (along with satire and elegy). The *We* is a kind of Arcadian *We*. But not facing backwards toward conditions before the beginning of civilization, not "back to Arcadia, but to Elysium"; *i.e.*, into a timeless world of the pure seeing of the phenomenon, where "the calm of perfection" prevails. Here everything that "individualizes" and limits the object disappears. The sun is experienced as the "light," an infinite thing. What is reflected in the poem is the *We* in its limitations before the unlimited. The reverential attitude, however, the secretly or ashamedly religious attitude (yearning to adore "under the thrill of sunset") calls up a more inconceivable, more glorious light in the sunlight. Thus what Schiller characterizes as the most difficult thing in the perfect idyll is successful, producing "action" in the calm of perfection. By taking part in this Arcadian *We* in its reflections this way and that, we experience the hundred-fold nature of the light that radiates over everything, the totality "sweet light."

Once more both poets meet, from opposite ends. Whitman finds the symbolic figure, the "symbolic object" for this Job situation—Columbus. The power of sympathy and his own passion for God permeate each other until they become identical. Thus in the last flight the grace of divine light is revealed. George experiences the phenomenon of light, he creates symbolic stature for it in the poem, with the aid of what Schiller¹² calls "the symbolizing intelligence," the ability to give meaning. Whitman expands his self into

the Columbus symbol (faithful to the leaves of grass metaphor); George creates stature for the phenomenon of light, the ideal of the divine, in the transparency of the light of the sun for a higher light.

X

We have devoted ourselves to a task of comparative literature that is not customary. Here differentiation is put before comparison; it was to be tested by the most extreme contrasts. The justification for the bold coordination lies in Schiller's ingenious theory of types, which is confirmed in the basic relationship here. Just as Schiller arrived at his boldly dividing conceptual pair, Naive-Sentimental, by means of the greatest acumen and, at the same time, a profound existential need, with which he had to hold his own against Goethe, so in the Whitman-George contrast a world tension is expressed in which the art forms are developed against each other out of the law of inner form and, at the same time, out of profound existential contrast. Whitman's overwhelming sympathy with everything and in everything, his feeling for the masses, his feeling for Nature, his feeling for God, his feeling for comradeship, all are further creative developments of Schiller's "susceptibility" of the naive genius. George's imperious spirit of form, with the distance of mass-despising self, with the powerful stride toward the league of which he forms the center, all conforms with and develops from Schiller's counter-concept of "automatic action." One is threatened by the "object without intellect," the other by "the play of the intellect without an object." Both, however, are on the common ground of the symbol. A decisive task for comparative literature can be seen here as a special contribution to the theory of symbols. It lies in understanding (in the true sense of Wölfflin) the contrast of each thing from its own form values and, beyond this, in illuminating one thing through another.

At the same time, Schiller's essay must be seen not only typologically and esthetically, but existentially. Even here existential forces are in the background, the self-assertion of the spirit of European culture in the surging age of the masses. Just as Schiller ranges the realist in his linkage to the object against Goethe the idealist in his freedom, and finally ranges him above him, so George's fanatic intellectualization of life gains a dimension far beyond his own self as the development of a universal principle behind which stand Schiller's values, the heroic, the beautiful intensified to the sublime, and the tragic. The sick individualism of Europe has devalued them. It is only remnants which esthetic symbolism defends against

the invasion of Naturalism. Sentimental poetry, degenerated in the *Ressentiment* of the age, exposed to psychoanalytic disintegration, to the point of what the spirit of the age today calls "ambivalence"⁶³ and the "ambiguous," requires the supplementing contradiction of truly naive poetry to free itself from the restrictions that have been forced upon it. It is just in this that the great influence of Whitman lies, not only on the Naturalists, but also on Impressionists and Expressionists, and it is most characteristic that it has had its greatest effect just on those poets who are least sentimentally infected—the proletarian poets. Engelke and Lersch in Germany are freed of class *Ressentiment* by Whitman, and led back to the primitive force of their own naive simplicity, which reveals to them for the first time the manifold nature of their existence. In the general destruction of symbols today, the rise of piled-up allegories, along with true orgies of war Naturalism, it becomes the real existential task of comparative literature to emphasize the common ground of symbolic poetry, which links naive and sentimental poets.

The special nature of the comparative-differentiating method still requires justification. The comparison could be carried out only in lapidary abridgments. But it keeps moving from poem to poem. Only in this way is it possible to penetrate to the existential depths that open to the revealing symbol. The superiority of the special revealing ability over all the elucidating tasks that fall to reason shows itself methodically. The choice of poems from stage to stage out of a comprehensive total stock can fall only to that same organ to which symbolic stature reveals itself, revealing to the organ in which heart and emotion are involved in the way that the poet's language of symbols evokes them. Filling in the period gaps between the poems selected is, then, rather the business of the elucidating intellect. We have put it aside for the sake of the other task. George hagiographers will, perhaps, not be satisfied with the appreciation of their master. In this connection let at least one judgment be cited that confirms our interpretation. George's friend of many years, the poet Verwey,⁶⁴ considered the Maximin cult "prophetic propaganda."⁶⁵

Notes

¹Cf. A. Closs, *Die freien Rhythmen in der deutschen Lyrik* (Bern, 1947), 192.

²“Song of Myself,” Sec. 6.

³“One’s-Self I Sing.”

⁴*Blätter für die Kunst, Auslese 1892-98* (Berlin, 1899), 10.

⁵Schiller, *Werke*, Jubiläumsausgabe (Stuttgart, 1905), XII, 188.

⁶Stefan George, *Stern des Bundes*, 99; *Star of the Covenant* (Marx and Morwitz translation—see note on title for this essay—, hereafter referred to as “Trs.” 275). Cited according to George’s Bondi-Originalausgaben. The text is not in George’s minuscule, but has been normalized, on the assumption that George’s work has grown beyond his esoteric circle.

⁷“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” Sec. 9 [1867 edition].

⁸*Hymnen* (Berlin, 1890), 12; *Odes*, Trs., 3. Friedrich Gundolf, *George* (Berlin, 1920), 62.

⁹“Out of the Cradle . . .,” Sec. 7.

¹⁰Schiller, *op. cit.*, 183.

¹¹*Hymnen*, 96; *Algabal: A Realm Below*, Trs., 29.

¹²Gundolf, *op. cit.*, 86.

¹³Schiller, *op. cit.*, 239 ff.

¹⁴*Hymnen*, 109; *Odes: Days*, Trs., 34.

¹⁵*Jahr der Seele*, 22; *Year of the Soul: After the Harvest*, Trs., 84.

¹⁶“Song of Myself,” Sec. 5.

¹⁷*Stern des Bundes*, 46; *Star of the Covenant*, Book Two, Trs., p. 259.

¹⁸Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral* (1886).

¹⁹M. Scheler, “Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen,” *Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, I (Leipzig, 1915).

²⁰H. Pongs, *Das Bild in der Dichtung* (Marburg, 1939), II, 21 ff.

²¹“Years of the Modern.”

²²Schiller, *op. cit.*, 233.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Jahr der Seele*, 118; *Year of the Soul: Mournful Dancer*, Trs., 115.

²⁵Schiller, *op. cit.*, 233, 230.

²⁶Henry Seidel Canby, *Walt Whitman, An American* (Boston, 1943), 148, 156.

²⁷“Salut au Monde!”, Sec. 3.

²⁸“Song of the Open Road,” Sec. 1.

²⁹Schiller, *op. cit.*, 234-235.

³⁰*Teppich des Lebens; Tapestry of Life*, Trs., 130.

³¹Schiller, *op. cit.*, 240.

³²“I Sing the Body Electric,” Sec. 5.

³²Letter to Schiller, August 16, 1797.

³³"I Sing the Body Electric," Sec. 3.

³⁴"Whoever You Are Now Holding Me in Hand."

³⁵Poem of same title as metaphor.

³⁶"The Prairie-Grass Dividing."

³⁷"These I Singing in Spring."

³⁸"A Song" (1860).

³⁹*Jahr der Seele*, 93; *Year of the Soul*, Trs., 106.

⁴⁰*Der Siebente Ring*, 96; *The Seventh Ring*, Trs., 194.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 197.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 178.

⁴³*Star of the Covenant*, 259.

⁴⁴Schiller, *op. cit.*, 259.

⁴⁵"I Sit and Look Out."

⁴⁶*Stern des Bundes*, 26; *Star of the Covenant*, Trs., 253.

⁴⁷"The Dresser," Sec. 4.

⁴⁸Schiller, *op. cit.*, 194.

⁴⁹*Das Neue Reich*, 30; *The Kingdom Come*, Trs., 291.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, Trs., 293.

⁵²"A Sight in Camp in the Day-Break Grey and Dim."

⁵³*Das Neue Reich; The Kingdom Come*, Trs., 294.

⁵⁴"When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd."

⁵⁵Schiller, *op. cit.*, 174.

⁵⁶*Des Neue Reich*, 114 (1919); *The Kingdom Come*, Trs., 333.

⁵⁷Schiller, *op. cit.*, 191.

⁵⁸"Prayer of Columbus."

⁵⁹*Das Neue Reich*, 136; *The Kingdom Come*, Trs., 344. See also Werner Siebert, *Der alte Stefan George* (Mainz, 1939), 31.

⁶⁰Schiller, *op. cit.*, 228 ff.

⁶¹To Goethe, August 31, 1794.

⁶²Gottfried Benn, *Der Ptolemäer* (Wiesbaden, 1949), 39: "The phenotype of today integrates ambivalence."

⁶³Albert Verwey, *Mein Verhältnis zu Stefan George* (Leipzig-Strassburg-Zürich, 1936), 62.

⁶⁴That the extensive American research on individual Whitman problems could not be considered is due to the situation of the German scholar today. The following works were referred to: Harry Law-Robertson, *Walt Whitman in Deutschland* (Giessen, 1935); Henry Bryan Binns, *A Life of Walt Whitman* (London, 1905); Henry Seidel Canby, *Walt Whitman, ein Amerikaner* (Berlin, 1947); F. O. Matthiessen, *Amerikanische Renaissance* (Wies-

baden, 1948). Objections could be made that in the European spectrum of form George represents only a one-sided variety. As a representative of Symbolism he stands for the collective European style in close relationship to Mallarmé more clearly than Rilke with his Eastern blend. Of the very comprehensive George scholarship we name only the principal works: Gundolf, *George* (Berlin 1920), F. W. Wolters, *George u. die Blätter für die Kunst, Deutsche Geistesgeschichte seit 1890* (Berlin, 1930); Ernst Morwitz, *Die Dichtung Stefan Georges* (Berlin, 1934); Mario Pensa, *Stefan George* (Bologna, 1935); Werner Siebert, *Der alte Stefan George* (Mainz, 1939); I. M. Aler, *Im Spiegel der Form; strikritisches Wege zur Deutung von Stefan Georges Maximindichtung* (Amsterdam, 1947); Edward Jaime, *Stefan George und die Weltliteratur* (Ulm, 1949). On Symbolism: Enid Lowry Duthie, *L'Influence du symbolisme français dans le renouveau poétique de l'Allemagne; les Blätter für die Kunst de 1892 à 1900. . .* (Paris, 1933). Cecil Maurice Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London, 1943). For George in England: August Closs, *The Genius of the German Lyric* (London, 1938). English translation: *The Works of Stefan George*, rendered into English by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, No. 2, 1949. According to information from Jaime, a collected edition in English is being prepared by Cyril Scott, poet, composer, and writer.

Whitman in France

THE FIRST FRENCH critic to notice Whitman was Louis Etienne (see Bibliography), in 1861, but all Etienne could see in him was an intolerable literary "rowdy," taking his cue from one of the poet's own passages. For a decade Whitman aroused little if any further interest in France, but in the early 1870's he became a force to be reckoned with. In 1872 Mme. Blanc (Thérèse Bentzon) warned, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, against the "tendencies" which Whitman represented in literature, especially his realism, his materialism, and his exaltation of the masses. A Parnassian poet, Emile Blémont, replied to Mme. Blanc in a series of articles in which he defended Whitman's "ensemble" of body and soul, his individualism, his democracy, championing "without shame the holiness of the flesh and the carnal instincts." Five years later the controversy was still going on, and Henri Cochin was declaring that *Leaves of Grass* was "Democracy run wild, a form of insanity and megalomania."

In 1884 Léo Quesnel argued that Whitman was not enough of an artist to appeal to French readers. Yet at the same time he admitted that there were indications that the old distinctions between poetry and prose were breaking down, and that Walt Whitman might after all be right in considering himself "L'initiateur d'une poétique nouvelle faite à la taille des destinées incommensurables de l'Amerique, un Christophe Colomb de la littérature." (The initiator of a new poetic technique to tally the incommensurable future of America, a Christopher Columbus of literature.) In 1888 Gabriel Sarrazin, in a long essay on "The Poetry of Walt Whit-

man," defined the American poet's mysticism and pantheism and reiterated the idea dear to Whitman himself that here was a poet who was no artist but that his writings transcended art.

By this time Whitman was beginning to have a very considerable impact on French literature, though it is difficult to determine whether he initiated new ideas and experiments in style or merely paralleled a literary revolution already well under way. Some of the Symbolists were attracted to him, and two especially, who happened to have been born in America—Francis Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill, the latter born at Hempstead, Long Island. Vielé-Griffin called the attention of Jules Laforgue to *Leaves of Grass*, and Laforgue made some good translations which he published in 1886 as "Translations of the astonishing American poet, Walt Whitman." The problem of Whitman's actual influence on the Symbolist movement is too complicated for analysis here, but a recent scholar in this field, P. Mansell Jones (see Bibliography), says, "It is remarkable how clearly Whitman saw the trend of coming changes." In an essay called "Poetry of the Future" Whitman predicted that poetic art would "aim at the free expression of emotion . . . and [attempt] to arouse and initiate, more than to define or finish." It would be highly subjective, with both "direct and indirect references continually to the reader," and its "born sister" would be music. He quoted Sainte-Beuve as saying, "The greatest poet is not he who has done the best; it is he who suggests the most; he, not all of whose meaning is at first obvious, and who leaves much to desire, to explain, to study, much to complete in your [the reader's] turn."

Since Poe is usually regarded as the American poet who influenced the Symbolists most (through Baudelaire and Mallarmé particularly), any claim for Whitman's influence may seem questionable, and indeed the Symbolists would probably have reached their doctrines of the innate similarity of music and poetry, and the power of each to "suggest," without having heard of Walt Whitman. Nevertheless, many did hear of him, and some tried their hands at translating him. The Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren, who started out as a Symbolist and then broke away from the movement to become the poet of the modern city, of science and industrialism, and social consciousness, wrote poems so like Whitman's in ideas, imagery, and prosodic techniques that he would be regarded as an outright disciple if it could be proved that he had read *Leaves of Grass*—which he apparently had not. The resemblance must, therefore, be attributed to Whitman's having so accurately anticipated "the poetry of the future."

Although toward the end of the century it was mainly the Symbolists, and their successors, who translated Whitman, by the early twentieth century the socialists had discovered him. In 1901 Daniel Halévy, a "Dreyfusiste," translated "Chants démocratiques," rendering "A Song for Occupations," for example, as "Aux Ouvriers." Six years later Elsie Masson published a critique entitled "Walt Whitman, ouvrier et poète." Like Halévy, she saw Whitman as a social revolutionist. Thus in less than half a century Whitman was presented in France as a dangerous barbarian and democrat, a mystic, a heroic personality, and now appeared the legend of Walt Whitman the workman, which was to become more and more popular.

The first group to seize upon Whitman as a prophet and model was the Unanimists, under the leadership of Jules Romains. As Baldensperger says, "The movement known as *l'unanimisme*, aiming at a sort of pantheistic and pan-social vision where the poor individual is more or less absorbed, claimed him as a master." Whitman's influence is very obvious in Romains' *La Vie unanime* (1908). But it was Léon Bazalgette, another Unanimist, who published the first French biography, *Walt Whitman: l'homme et son oeuvre* (1908), and the first complete translation of the poems, *Feuilles d'herbe* (1909)—later revised. In Bazalgette's idealized version (the adjective applies both to his biography and translation) Whitman became widely known in France.

But André Gide was displeased with this "prettified" version, and as early as 1913 he planned to publish a new translation and appealed to Paul Claudel to help him. (*Correspondance* of Claudel and Gide, 210-222.) After Gide published *Les Caves du Vatican*, however, Claudel, a devout Catholic, wrote that he could no longer collaborate on a Whitman translation. Some critics have thought that Claudel himself was influenced by Whitman's style, but he denied it and became antagonistic toward the American poet after he learned that Gide saw in him a kindred homo-erotic.

On April 1, 1913, Guillaume Apollinaire published in the *Mercur de France* an astonishing account of Whitman's funeral. Apollinaire claimed that an eye-witness had told him that the funeral was held in a circus tent, that a barbecue lunch with barrels of beer was provided for the disorderly crowd that attended, and that three brass bands played continually. Many perverted men came, everyone drank enormously, the festivities lasted until dawn, and some of the impromptu speakers punctuated their remarks by thumping on the coffin with their fists. Stuart Merrill replied to this fantastic account

(there was a tent and a large crowd, and the funeral service was unconventional, but it was dignified), and other correspondents defended Whitman's character. Finally Eduard Bertz, formerly a great admirer of Whitman in Germany but now disillusioned, attempted to anatomicize the poet's sex pathology, and the discussion continued through 1913 and into 1914. Possibly Apollinaire's first letter was an attempted hoax, but some of his later replies to his critics were in a serious tone.

Interest in Whitman continued through the war, and in 1918 Gide's long-projected translation (selected) was published, with an introductory essay on Whitman in France (first published in 1914) by Valéry Larbaud. The poems were translated by Gide, Larbaud, Laforgue, Louis Fabulet, and Vielé-Griffin. This still remains probably the best French version of Whitman's poems.

In the early 1920's Whitman's reputation in France reached its greatest peak. Lectures were given on him in the universities, critics wrote about him more than ever, and various groups adopted him for their own literary or social programs. In 1921 Bazalgette published *Le Poème-Evangile de Walt Whitman*, in which he deified the poet and interpreted his poems as Scripture. But Gide and his friends continued to admire Whitman in their own way. Larbaud drew heavily upon him for *Les Poésies de A. O. Barnabooth*. As with Laforgue, the irony and satire were quite unlike Whitman, but Larbaud borrowed many international and cosmic motifs from *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1929 Jean Catel published one of the major biographical and critical studies of the decade on Whitman, called *Walt Whitman: La Naissance du Poète*, tracing Whitman's intellectual and esthetic growth from his youth through the writing of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The following year Catel supplemented this monumental work with *Rythme et langage dans la première édition des "Leaves of Grass."* Catel was the first critic in any country to attempt a combined psychological and esthetic interpretation of Whitman's life and art through his imagery, symbolism, vocabulary, and rhythm. Unfortunately, these books have never been translated into English, but M. Asselineau's fine selected translations in the present volume give a sample of Catel's interpretations. Not all of his views are still tenable, but these selections are still capable of giving an American student of Whitman new insights.

At the end of World War II literary France was still interested in Whitman, and as two decades earlier, for a diversity of reasons. In 1948 Paul Jamati edited a new book of selected translations, to

which he contributed a long biographical and critical essay idealizing the man in the vein of Bazalgette. He accused all the psychological critics of Whitman of indirectly trying to destroy democracy by undermining the greatest poet of democracy. Jamati was indeed a disciple of Bazalgette, for he made no new translations but reprinted selected poems from Bazalgette's *Feuilles d'Herbe*.

Jamati's book was followed by a new version of Whitman's poems, with another long introduction, by Pierre Messiaen, called *Walt Whitman: Choix de Poèmes* (1951). Messiaen's introduction is full of minor errors of fact, and his translations contain some amusing "boners," but his poems are well chosen and his general critical interpretations intelligent. But it remained for Roger Asselineau to write the most accurate and scholarly book on Whitman ever published in France. *L'Evolution de Walt Whitman après la première édition des Feuilles d'Herbe* was presented in 1953 at the Sorbonne for the Doctorat ès Lettres, and received a unanimous "Très Honorable," the highest recognition awarded by the examiners. The book was published in Paris in 1954. Although ostensibly continuing Catel's study through the remaining editions of *Leaves of Grass*, Asselineau wrote his book with complete independence in method and judgment, with scrupulous accuracy, sound scholarship, and acute critical insight. He spent three years in America gathering material, and he has now earned a place among the leading Whitman scholars of the world. His book should start a new epoch in Whitman's reception in France.

Development of the Poet*

By Valéry Larbaud

Translated by Roger M. Asselineau

[After a brief sketch of Whitman's youth and early career, Valéry Larbaud studies the crucial years between 1850-1855, during which the poet was composing *Leaves of Grass* and at the same time writing "barrels of lectures," in the words of his brother George.]

WHAT WERE THOSE LECTURES? What did Whitman want to speak about? Some biographers are amazed at Whitman's capacity for work, because one has found, after his death, registers in which he had classified and pasted a good many magazine articles, pages torn from books, etc., on all kinds of subjects. On the other hand, in view of this cheap scholarship some people have a little too quickly jumped to the conclusion that Whitman was self-taught. We are all self-taught. No matter how ideas and knowledge are gained, what really matters is how this knowledge has been understood, criticized, assimilated. As a matter of fact we have a fairly long fragment from the project of a lecture by Whitman on romantic philosophy—based on elementary text-books. It would probably be necessary to make a close study of all the other fragments and go through Whitman's registers to appraise the amount of knowledge he had gained and weigh with precision the part which this knowledge played in the development of his genius. But here is a hypothesis based on the indications given by the "papers" contained in the Camden Edition:

Between 1848 and 1850, under the threefold influence of German idealistic philosophy, the spectacle which the U. S. offered him and the reading of Emerson's essays, Whitman felt called upon to assume a lofty civic and religious mission, namely to give an ideal, a philosophy, a religion to the American people then in the making. The Christian dogmas seemed to him outworn. He felt, or fancied he felt possessed of great truths, all brand new. And he wrote: "the priest is on the way out, the divine literatus comes."¹¹

First, let us consider the influence of German philosophy. Out of all that came from Europe—and all that came from the spirit which originated in Europe—fairly early, apparently, Whitman chose Hegelianism for his spiritual fare. Only a specialist could say what Whitman's work owes to German philosophy and in particular

*From Valéry Larbaud's "Etude" to *Walt Whitman: Oeuvres Choisies*, Paris, 1918, pp. 24-32 and 34-45.

to Hegelianism. But it undoubtedly owes much to them. He was descended from a long line of militant Christians and had even received a sort of Christian education. Above all, he needed a universal doctrine (If I fight against the churches, it is because I love the Church) and finding nothing satisfactory in the theology of the different sects whose moral corruption shocked him (The whole ideal of the church is low, repugnant, horrible), he spontaneously adhered to the great idealistic systems which issued from Germany. In his theoretical selfishness, one might find a reflection of Fichte's "Ich"; one may see in his aesthetic ideas a more or less deep mark of Schelling's doctrines. But Hegel took his fancy above all the others. The synthesis of opposites, the philosophical concept considered as logical, universal and concrete, the very "triadism" for which Hegel was so much criticized but thanks to which it has been possible to say that the dogma of the Trinity had been rationally reconstructed (cf. A. Véra, *Introduction à la philosophie de Hegel*, where this point is discussed); the God-Idea ceaselessly materializing in nature; evil as a necessary negation; nature and history as an odyssey of the spirit; the universe understood and unreservedly accepted; indefinite liberty and progress; such is the simplified and elementary form of Hegelianism with which Whitman became intoxicated just as he became intoxicated with the French and Italian operas that he frequently attended in New York. "Only Hegel," he wrote, "is fit for America, is large enough and free enough."² He also calls him the beloved doctor of his mind and soul. . . . To idealistic doctrines, Whitman paid the same deep, earnest, eager and uncritical attention as his ancestors had done to Christian doctrines. With him everything originates in the intellectual life of the mind, not in the so-called sentimental life. Everything has its source in the ethical activity and moral earnestness of this son and great-grandson of Protestant dissenters. The objection that one may raise: that he has never read the works of Hegel and knew them only through text-books,³ throws the better into relief this mystic character of Whitman's Hegelianism: how many of the first martyrs had read the Gospel? (And how many Hegelians are there not unaware that they are Hegelians? And how many triads one meets unexpectedly here and there!)

Let us note at this point that none of the great European poets of the nineteenth century has had such a broad philosophical basis or such a faith as a starting point for his aesthetic activity. (Christian writers were either sentimentalists or polemists, or both.)

It may be said that Whitman's poetry has been, in the field of art, the continuation of the German philosophical revolution and that his work is a sort of Gospel of the Hegelian revelation. . . . But let us note too that Hegelianism—as Benedetto Croce has shown it—is so vast and contains so many apparent, if not real, contradictions that immediately after the master's death the disciples split into two groups:⁴ Hegelians of the right (such as, to some extent, Carlyle, one of Whitman's masters) and Hegelians of the left whose first act was to publish the *Communist Manifesto*.⁵ Does Whitman as a Hegelian belong to the right or to the left of the movement? A specialist alone could solve the problem. But it does seem that the contradictions of the Hegelian doctrine are to be found again in Whitman's works and thought. It is more correct to say that Hegel acts as a stimulant to Whitman's thought and consequently to his works. (It could be interesting to know when and how the poet has been acquainted with the Hegelian doctrine and with romantic philosophy in general.) Before this man whose mind was so firmly settled on a broad basis of beliefs, and to demonstrate, as it were, that indefinite liberation and progress in which he believed, there was then taking place one of the most extraordinary events in history: the making of the American nation. It was the time when the growth of the U.S. was most rapid. The immense reservoir was filling. In a few years, the Western border, being constantly pushed back, had reached the Pacific, and the Southern border extended to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. The population of the towns had tripled and quadrupled in a short time. Ever more numerous immigrants were coming in and completely new living conditions awaited them in this brand-new country. To this, one should add the unrest which preceded the great crisis of the Union: two civilizations at strife in the bosom of the same nation.

It has been said of Henry James, and perhaps of many other American writers, that they have seen Europe as Americans and America as Europeans. Is it not strange that it should also be possible to apply this criticism to the great national poet of the United States? But skim through the volume of "Preparatory Thoughts and Readings": his idea of Europe is naive, and makes one smile. In a note, he wonders whether the European working class is not, even nowadays, such as Shakespeare depicted it. In another he says: "The definite history of the world cannot go farther than Egypt and in the most important particulars the average spirit of man, except in These States, has not gone forward of the spirit of Ancient Egypt."⁶

And again: "The English masses . . . in comparison with the masses of the United States are at least two hundred years behind us."⁷ Of course he had heard of the Holy Alliance; he knew that Poland had been parcelled out, Italy enslaved and that reactionary monarchism triumphed even in England where it was welcomed by the poets (Southey and Wordsworth—he reproached them for having betrayed the cause of freedom); above all . . . he had never gone to Europe. He believed that this lack of political liberty entailed a corresponding degradation of character, a sort of servility, an unfitness for modern life. A queer illusion, which the partial or apparent failure of the European revolutions (1830-1848) still reinforced. He despaired of Europe and like some of our revolutionaries, he regarded the United States as a virgin land where the human plant, cramped by the restraint of "feudal Europe" would at last grow freely and bear fruit. But then what about slavery in the Southern States? What about the moral barbarity whose effects he was soon to feel when his so-called sexual poems would be threatened by Puritan persecution?

But this state of mind explains why, in Whitman's works, the words "America," "These States," "Democracy," dissolve into the one word "Future." He acknowledges it in *Democratic Vistas*. He acknowledges it when he says that Longfellow is the poet who at the present time is the most suitable for the United States. It is precisely the people to whom he wants to give an ideal, that will be "America," "Democracy," etc. We have the raw material, man, the transplanted European. Let us help him to liberate himself and grow. Let us create great personalities; it is the function of the poet: "It is not that he gives his country great poems, it is that he gives his country the spirit which makes the greatest poems and the greatest material for poems. . . ."⁸

And, what carries us still farther into the future, he has in mind the whole of America. In a list of the States he claims to be addressing, we read: Nicaragua, and long before Ruben Darío had written *Los Cisnes* in which the poet asks anxiously:

"Tantos millones de hombres hablaremos inglés?"⁹ Whitman, addressing the three Americas, cried:

"Americanos! conquerors! . . ."¹⁰

(His frequent use of French and Spanish words may be another sign of this intention: he wants to speak in *lingua trina*: French, English, Spanish: the three languages of North America.)

To put the matter into a nutshell, America is for him the place where a Society in the making is to work out a new millenium. His

error has been to believe that America alone would have the intellectual, moral, etc., primacy over the rest of the world. And thus he may have failed to realize that when singing for his people, he was singing for all the white race, for all mankind.

Such was, roughly speaking, the part which the spectacle of the making of the modern United States played in the growth of the poet. We shall see later the part played by this same spectacle in the growth of the poem.

* * * * *

At the point we have now reached, namely the time when Whitman was writing "barrels" of lectures in his Brooklyn attic, we see a Whitman dedicated to the logical life and engrossed in his ethical preoccupations.

At no other time perhaps was he farther from his vocation as a poet. It is even alarming. Roughly speaking the whole tradition of the New England Christian preachers from the Mathers to Elias Hicks culminates in him. Is the poet in him going to be sacrificed to the preacher? It is a pity that we should not possess two or three complete lectures. At least we have the notes which relate to the lectures he had planned. They are very naive and rather vague. They could have been written ten years earlier by the young school-master-journalist of Long Island. In one of them he advises himself to make gestures; in another he speaks of a voluntary unpaid orator who would interrupt the politicians at the Capital and accost the President in the open street to remonstrate with him, etc. Elsewhere one gathers that his lectures would merely have been summaries of his magazine clippings and reading. Lastly, the impression left by all the notes and information relating to the lectures is that Whitman had no precise doctrine composed of simple elements to teach his people. He was not lacking in the gifts that make good orators (see his lecture on Lincoln's Death and the little speech he delivered on Emerson's grave). But what he wanted to express could not be held within the limits and form of a speech. Several critics have noticed that certain fragments of the Lectures resemble poems and announce *Leaves of Grass*. This is the greatest discovery of Whitman criticism. Yes, almost all Whitman's prose pieces tend to become poems.

Like plates in anatomy text-books on which you see the development of the embryo at the different stages of its gestation, the notes, fragments, prose pieces of Whitman show the growth of the poem. See for instance "The White House by moonlight" in *Speci-*

men Days and compare especially the Preface to the 1855 edition with the poem entitled "By Blue Ontario's Shore."

It is undeniably therefore this tendency towards poetry, this unrecognized and repressed aesthetic activity which eventually ruined the great preaching project conceived by Whitman. He realized at last that he possessed a more sensitive, delicate and receptive faculty than his intelligence and logical faculty. Rising from the innermost recesses of his moral life, through the superposed layers of his intellectual life, the great lyrical source had at last come to the surface and reached the light of consciousness. He did not stubbornly resist this incursion of an unreasonable and undisciplined element—his indolence, his yielding, "absorbing" nature once more stood him in good stead. Besides, his doctrine was vast enough to accept an outburst of lyricism. Whitman immediately understood that the best way to preach his ideal was to give himself unreservedly. Now literary creation and poetry alone could be the channel of this gift, or rather they were this gift itself. Thus he did not misunderstand his genius to the point of considering it merely as a means; he considered it both as a means and as an end; the moral preoccupation remained, but poetry was saved.

This event was probably hastened by his reading Emerson's *Essays*. One should read in R. W. Emerson's *Essays*, the one entitled "The Poet." It is almost the portrait of the poet as Whitman was to conceive him; it is very nearly Whitman's own portrait. "I was simmering," Whitman said, "Emerson brought me to a boil." We can take his word for it. But the main thing is that the poet having come of age at last should have entered into his inheritance. (As a result, his lecture on the "poet" was left unfinished.)

The 1855 edition, printed in Brooklyn by the author's own hands, appeared—with its volcanic "Preface," rather bad as a preamble and manifesto because, in fact, it was a poem in the making. It was followed by the first poems, with their immense titles,¹¹ the mastodons and iguanodons of Whitman's creation.

* * * * *

So far we have seen how the poet was formed, took shape and developed in Whitman; and we have tried to show the influences which were responsible for this development. Let us now see the elements and influences which were to determine the development of his poetry.

First of all, we find the intellectual activity. Basil de Sélincourt has a felicitous phrase for this: Whitman, he says in as many words, was or tried to be the first conscious poet. We think every great art-

ist is a conscious one and that in every great work of art the part played by the critical faculty is considerable. But it is certain that Whitman appears specially conscious. And this comes from the fact that, more than any other poet of his time, he has lived on two planes: the ethical and the aesthetic. And he is capable at any given moment of passing from one to the other. His whole mind seems to work at the same time, and one thus gets at once the most inspired and the most voluntary poems. Thus the outline of the work, the title of the work (the idea of growth dominating the poem) were found immediately and never changed. Everything concurs in the same result: statement of a doctrine, revelation of a personality, civic teaching. And the unity of the poem is undeniable. Thus it is, then, that 10 years after Edgar Allan Poe had proclaimed in his lecture on "The Poetic Principle" that it was impossible to write long poems, epic and didactic poems, etc., there appeared precisely in America the longest of the great didactic poems ever to be written.

But this very consciousness, this will is also that which harms the poem more than anything else. When the constructions of the ethical or logical activity do not find an aesthetic expression, whenever the thought fails to transmute itself into poetry, we get merely that "doctrine in its crudest form"¹² as Swinburne said. These are the times when Whitman forgets that his method can only be that of the philosopher. Hence the catalogues, almost all of them unsuccessful, which will never take another meaning than the one they have, whatever H. Bryan Binns may think, and will never be, whatever Miguel de Unamuno may say, the supreme culmination of lyricism, but rather the result of an impotence to express. Hence also horrible lapses into allegory. It is then indeed that Whitman is "above art" or beneath, or beside it: for the poet cannot free himself from art, which is his very freedom. He simply loses his way in philosophy, which is not his field. It might have been preferable for him to persist in writing the other "athletic book"; the lectures would have been derivatives for his doctrine . . . and we should not have been obliged to read them.

Let us note this, but let us not underrate the importance of Whitman's doctrine in his poem. It is the great motive force in his works. It threw him out of the so-called normal path, and tore him away from a career—without any interest or profit for us—as a journalist and popular or well-advertised writer. It put him on *his* path, the path to immortality. And it remained the great stimulant to the artist: a synthesis of opposites, the glorification of democracy (which is less the exaltation of the common man than that of the essential

man). America, These States, such are the fetish-words which rouse his inspiration and awake the muse of the New World. In a word, such is Whitman's religion. This is the deep source of his naivety (in the double meaning of the word): the virtue which made him rediscover on his own account the reason, the function, the dignity and the scope of art; and also the simplicity which gave him the courage to undertake, in spite of everything he lacked (and he lacked a lot!) the exploitation of the vast province which he had discovered.

* * * * *

The other great factor—an exciter, too—was the spectacle offered by the United States then in the making. (Living in New York was enough: it was like feeling the pulse of the land.) B. de Sélincourt almost reproaches Whitman for being the poet of an “unfinished nation.” But it was precisely Whitman's luck to be the poet of a nation in the making; at least, this is what an Hegelian for whom history is nothing but the history of the indefinite development of liberty, must have thought. The United States in the XIXth century laid the very image of this development under Whitman's eyes and thus encouraged him to write the poem of the pioneers, projected towards the future, the songs of the forward march, the momentary retreat and the renewed advance. Lastly, his nation at work and at war gave him without the help of any philosophy, the feeling of modern life and made him discover the poetry of the work and wealth of man.

HISTORY OF *Leaves of Grass*

The appearance of *Leaves of Grass* was no more noticed than the appearance of any collection of society verse in the European tradition published in the same year of 1855.¹³ But at the end of the summer, Whitman received the famous letter by which Emerson recognized him and inducted him. Until now it is the finest thing that ever took place in America. Through Emerson the good news was announced to Europe and the whole world: “Americans abroad, may now come home: unto us a man is born.”¹⁴

It seems that at this point, assured of ultimate success, Whitman had nothing to do but devote himself to the construction of his poem, a rather absorbing task. A European poet like Wordsworth for instance, once assured that his success does not depend on a coterie, but is guaranteed to him by a certain correspondence between his poetry and the taste of an élite, keeps quiet. He will even be accused of lagging behind to the best of his ability once he is

famous. But Whitman identified himself with his poem, and his poem is his doctrine, the salvation of his people and of Democracy. If he had had a fortune, he would have spent it in advertisements to make people read his poem. At least he printed a second edition of it on the back of which he engraved a sentence from Emerson's letter: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." A big blunder; and he was to make others. For he was not intelligent in the vulgar sense of the word. For the first time he took the offensive. But he did not know how to set about it. What he carried in him, that poetry which has given us such pleasure, deafened him, made him incapable of any social success; he merely succeeded in passing for the most impudent of climbers. His importunity met with silence. And when at last he found followers, he incited them so much to praise him that self-respecting critics, though favorable to Whitman, refused to join "the ignoble fray" (J. A. Symonds).¹⁵ Abroad, he passed for a simpleton, hungry for fame; a European critic wrote: "the mere mention of his name in a newspaper made him cry for joy."

While carrying on this ill-fated war, without losing his calm, he pursued his work. And lo! scandal and slander were added to incomprehension and hatred. The intervention of Europe was necessary to make America respect this great son of civilization. In the meantime it merely rejected his work into thicker obscurity. . . . But neither public opinion nor Emerson's arguments, nor the very interest of his book drew a single concession from Whitman. He was too much the man of God, he was too attentive to the "still small voice" to compromise with the world. In a poem written in his old age, he compared himself to Christopher Columbus, the most illustrious of great men known for their stubbornness.

* * * * *

From then on [after the Civil War] his life and work are better known to us. So far we have hardly caught sight of him. And even after he was surrounded by friends capable of telling us about him, in Washington, a part of his life—the part which he devoted to his young friend Peter Doyle—remains obscure. However, he appears to us as a humble public servant whose external life was almost as regular as that of Kant. Of course his whole life was directed towards his poem. It was because of his father that he remained a bachelor. (An instinct has impelled me to form no ties. . . .) One must say so: he was a man of letters; such was his trade, his main concern and that since 1850, if not since the beginning. And what is

more, it is only because he was a man of letters that we are interested in him.

Another trait appears. We must renounce seeing Whitman as a hearty comrade, an unceremonious "pal," a good fellow, etc. Someone has been aware of his reserve and has even used the word aloofness which implies distance and almost a haughty reserve. . . . Let us beware: maybe this poet who claimed to live intensely has lived above all with and in his book; maybe the "great comrade" has been a great solitaire. . . . (The poem ending with: ". . . filled with the bitterest envy," might be a confession.)

This reserve may have accounted for something of the ascendancy which Whitman soon exercised over his friends in Washington and later in Camden after his second stroke (summer of 1873). This second stroke turned him into an old man.

There he is, in Camden. But his friends, his admirers take good care of him. It is a noble sight.

All these good people should be mentioned by name. Let us merely mention the most faithful and the best known of them: John Burroughs, W. D. O'Connor, E. C. Stedman, Anne Gilchrist, Dr. R. M. Bucke and his first young admirer Miss Mary Whitall Smith (now Mrs. Berenson).

Illness, destitution, old age; he said so himself, such are the conditions under which he completed the poem so triumphantly begun in 1850. But the picture was not so dark as he chose to see it. He had always been satisfied with little and he lacked nothing. It was even at this time of his life that he made his longest journeys and had the most leisure. Above all, he was famous, and he knew it. He was famous . . . in Europe and as a consequence he was beginning to be recognized in America. It was the time when he over-worked the cameras. He was taking his revenge: the reporters who had split their sides with laughter over an old copy of the 1855 edition that strayed into a newspaper office, now came from New York to Philadelphia to take down in shorthand the statements of the "good gray poet." Yet he was not satisfied. He still urged that people should read his poem and he could not bear criticism. He had never ceased to see in *Leaves of Grass* the remedy, the book which was to give America "the spirit which makes great poems." A mixture of scandal, curiosity, gossip—in short, of nothing but noise—his personal fame was not worth anything in his eyes unless it might help the poem. But how disappointing! He had thought he would be read, understood, absorbed by that American people, that

American working-class which he had sung, and lo, it was the *literati* of Europe who were reading him and if any readers were to be found in America, they were millionaire Quakers from Philadelphia, and Mr. Andrew Carnegie!

But he kept his illusions. Bliss Perry has written that, in the last years of his life, Whitman was no longer in touch with the spirit of his age. But on the contrary Whitman had every reason to believe that it was his age that had drifted away from him. (It was the eclipse of idealism; it was scientism, the time which has been called philosophical barbarism.)

"I do not think," wrote John Burroughs to W. D. O'Connor, "that either you or I are the custodians of Whitman's fame or that it lies in our power to make or unmake it." We may be confident that this truly expresses what all Whitman's friends thought, the small group, the small court at Camden. That is probably why they had no scruples in collecting so many—indeed too many—of Whitman's words.

He was evidently declining, physically and intellectually. Certain habits force themselves upon him, almost monomanias. He is more and more preoccupied with the immediate success of his work (as though he had not known success for a long time). There he is in his old age:

"Old age land-lock'd within its winter bay,"¹⁶ and there he is alone—his "many tearing passions,"¹⁷ the life of streets and ports which he had "absorbed" with vacant eyes and hand on hip—alone with the book, which falls heavily upon him. Everything has reference to it. They tell him about Wagner's music and he thinks of the music of *Leaves of Grass*. He judges the writers of his time according to their opinion of *Leaves of Grass*. It was then—and only then—that he was the "great literary egotist" whom Bliss Perry compared to Montaigne (one wonders why). Shall we go so far as to say that he finally admired in himself the author of *Leaves of Grass*? What does it matter to us?

THE RESULTS

Criticism has once for all done away with its custom of distributing white or black balls. Its function is to follow the development of literary history, which is the history of Expression and to examine its failures and successes. Great works are those which mark the main stages of this history. It is thus perfectly useless to discuss their merit. But they have their own particular history:

failures and successes in pure expression, a mortal part and a living part.

MORTAL PARTS:

Whitman has placed himself with all those who, for the sake of convenience, come under the heading "Men of '48." Gross simplification of problems: lack of culture, function of the poet warped, extended to a field (social or religious) where its action is necessarily very limited. Hence the didactic (and consequently archaic and at first sight unprepossessing) character of his work, and all the dead weight of doctrine which his lyricism carries along with it. Belief in the impending advent of the "people." Hence his appeal to the American "masses." This has been flatly belied by facts: even nowadays his poetry is meant only for the highest and most exclusive of aristocracies: the happy few.

This leads us to the question of Whitman's and of all artists' nationality. A delicate question—but solved—and so well!—by the author of a preface to a German anthology who wrote—to our joy: "Der französische (aber deutsch fühlende) echte Lyriker Verlaine." (So let us not ponder over this: we should come to the conclusion that Whitman was Dutch . . . or German.)

Yes, he was American, but it is because we smell in the living part of his work a certain undefinable odor which we also find in Hawthorne, Thoreau, a novel by H. K. Viéle and three short stories by G. W. Cable. But he is not American because he was the self-appointed poet of America. Here, too, facts have given him the lie: he was as unappreciated in the United States as Stendhal in Grenoble or Cézanne in Aix. His doctrine is German and his masters are English; as regards his purely intellectual life he was a European living in America. But most of the happy few live in Europe. Thus it was in Europe only that he could be, and was, recognized.

Another question to be examined. It is also out of the more transient part of the work that there have grown all the political parasites (anarchists, sentimental socialists) who have contributed to spread the name of Whitman and obscure the critical study of his works. A careful examination shows that in reality Whitman (who, indeed, presents himself to European revolutionaries with the red flag in his hand) is connected with anarchistic doctrines, etc., only through Hegelianism, and that he is even more conservative than most Hegelians of the left. It is certain that, to his mind, individual property is an indispensable form of liberty. So there you are.

LIVING ELEMENTS:

He also had all the qualities that we attribute to the "men of '48": faith in life and in man, enthusiasm, etc. Hence the choice of his doctrine and all the consequences that follow from it. Hence, above all, the virtue which makes him give himself and celebrate throughout his poem the free gift of the individual to society. Such is this love, this passionate friendship that he sings. His egoism is nothing less sensual than his sexual poems and nothing less impersonal than his selfishness. But in reality this aspect is the culmination of a movement which originates in the whole inner life of the poet (ideas and feelings, characteristics), and which remains all impregnated with it. Thus, he exalts as a means of republican cohesion, as the unshakeable basis of the modern nation what he calls "manly love," a sort of Achillean friendship, but at the same time it is this love, this passionate friendship that he sings. His egoism is really the cultivation and development of the "ego," but this cultivation and development are turned towards social and human service. Such was his discovery and it is entirely his own: a poetry of the self purged from egoism in the narrow meaning of the word, of the self ennobled by everything that it repudiates; of the self that gives up sulking in a corner or taking good care of itself, or cultivating its idiosyncrasies or worshipping itself, but lives in contact with the other egos, lives "*en masse*." This is precisely what gives him, in his age, that importance, those colossal dimensions which make him resemble, in the middle of the poets of his time, a transatlantic liner in the middle of a flotilla of sailing-ships. Neither his genius nor the volume of his work would give him so much importance. It comes from this discovery: the claiming and taking possession of a vast poetic province: all the social man. The religious man and the "divine" man, he shares with all the European writers of the first half of the nineteenth century.

But the doctrine, however broad it may be, will become antiquated. The province he has annexed will in the end be completely settled. What will remain of the work then?

In the last analysis: pure expression. Whatever those who see works of art through political prejudices may think, it is there that the step forward has been taken, and the blow for the "good old cause" struck; it is in the expression itself that there has been an increase in human liberty. This is the core of Whitman, his poetry, recognizable by that tone which Basil de Sélincourt has called the "conversational tone," but to which it would be better to apply the

word Jacques Rivière recently used with reference to the poetry of Paul Claudel: "effusion" (Wordsworth in hatred of the poetic dictation of the eighteenth century had looked for it; Whitman has found it).

What does it matter if the doctrine becomes antiquated? The theological subtleties which Dante's verse was merely meant to clothe, do not touch us any more, but his stanza can still tell us:

"Ponete mente almen com' io son bella."¹⁸

(We have not tried to define Walt Whitman's poetry. We have merely wished to conduct our investigation along the line where the poet and the poem meet. But we have no analysis of rhythm or style, no formula to offer. We have been satisfied with reconnoitering the great earthen socle which serves as a basis and matrix for the beautiful pure rock. Let others try to climb it. But we know at least that beyond the point we have reached, there is nothing but bare stone, and the sky.)

May, 1914

Notes

¹“Democratic Vistas,” *Complete Writings*, vol. V, p. 54.

²*Complete Writings*, vol. 9, p. 168.

³And this has not been proved: Whitman’s library (*i.e.* the books he had read) is not known to us with sufficient precision.

⁴B. Croce: “Ce qui est vivant et ce qui est mort de la philosophie de Hegel.” Trad. Henri Burriot.

⁵Cf. Jean Jaurès’s Latin thesis, chap. IV.

⁶*Notes and Fragments*, p. 101 (60).

⁷*Notes and Fragments*, p. 80 (14).

⁸*Notes and Fragments*, p. 68 (49).

⁹“Shall we, so many millions of men, speak English?”

¹⁰“Starting from Paumanok,” §3, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 13.

¹¹Such titles appeared only in the 1856 edition. In the first edition the poems had no titles at all. (Translator’s note)

¹²In *Under the Microscope*, 1872.

¹³The appearance of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* was for the contemporaries the great poetic event of the year.

¹⁴In a letter to Moncure Conway.

¹⁵J. A. Symonds: *Walt Whitman*, p. 3.

¹⁶“Of that blithe throat of thine,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 430.

¹⁷“My 71st Year,” *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹⁸“Bear at least in mind that I am beautiful.”

Whitman's Symbolism*

By Jean Catel

Translated by Roger M. Asselineau

IN WHITMAN'S OWN WORDS, "the expression of the American poet is to be . . . *indirect* and not direct or descriptive and epic. . . Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated . . . not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative and has vista."¹ It will suffice to put side by side with these words a few verse and prose passages which will throw light on each other:

... spring-time is here! the summer is here! and what is this in it
and from it?

Thou, soul, unloosen'd—the restlessness after I know not what;

Come let us lag here no longer, let us be up and away!

O if I could fly like a bird!

O to escape, to sail forth as in a ship!

To glide with thee O soul, o'er all, in all as a ship over the waters;
Gathering these hints, the preludes, the blue sky, the grass, the
morning drops of dew,

The lilac-scent, the bushes with dark green heart-shaped leaves,

Wood-violets, the little delicate pale blossoms called innocence;

Sample and sorts not for themselves alone, but for their *atmosphere*,

To grace the bush I love—to sing with the birds,

A warble for joy of lilac-time, returning in reminiscence.²

All this concerns lilacs which Whitman from childhood associated with his most intimate memories:

There was a child went forth every day . . .

The early lilacs became part of this child,

And grass and white and red morning-glories, and white and red
clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird . . .³

Nature, the outside world have become part of his soul,

("To glide with thee O soul, o'er all, in all . . .")⁴ to such an extent that flowers, trees, brooks, animals have become his very soul, reflections of its inner light, forms of its progressive life. Nature has

*From Jean Catel's *Walt Whitman, la naissance du poète*, Paris, 1929, Chap. II, pp. 439-452; and Conclusion, pp. 466-469.

become "le milieu coloré" (the colored medium) of which Baudelaire speaks⁵ where artistic composition takes place, that is to say in Whitman's case: the Soul. This is what Whitman repeatedly expresses. Let us quote a text recently published by Emory Holloway in *The American Mercury* for December 1924:

The kernel of every object that can be seen, felt or thought of, has its relations to the soul, and is significant of something there. He who can tear off all husks and skins and pierce straight through every stratagem of concealment—⁶

Let us again quote Baudelaire:

Tout l'univers visible n'est qu'un magasin d'images et de signes auxquels l'imagination donnera une place et une valeur relatives; c'est une espèce de pâture que l'imagination doit digérer et transformer . . .⁷

Of course, it was something new in France when Baudelaire was thus laying the foundations of Symbolism. But, on close inspection, one realizes that this theory was common practice in English poetry. For Spenser, Keats, Shelley and even for Donne, the outside world had been nothing but a "shop of images and signs."

Whitman frequently reverts to the theory that true poetry is "indirect."

"Something ecstatic and undemonstrable"⁸ which underlies life, this alone can be the object of a poem. The subject (if it is necessary that there be a subject) is merely a pretext; the matter, the suggestion or, as Whitman says, the "indirection" of it is eternal. He is convinced that this attitude is new. He throws back into the shadows of the past all the European poets who have been "descriptive" and "epic," "the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new."⁹

Whitman thus states the very principle of symbolism and it could not be otherwise. For, let us remember that Whitman communicates to the reader what is most unreal in him and yet is most powerful. A dream, but a dream on which all life depends. A shade of color, but a shade which tinges all the days and nights of a man. In short, Whitman "celebrates his soul." Now, the very definition implies it, the unconscious is ineffable. In every age and in every place, mystics have professed themselves powerless to express their ecstacies in intelligible terms. They can give us only pale reflections of them. In the same manner, a poet of Whitman's temper will succeed in communicating with us only through "suggestions" and "preludes," to use terms familiar to Whitman. He suggested the ineffable and wrote preludes to the great themes of life and death;

such was his attitude. Such was to be presently the attitude of the French symbolists.

The originality of Whitman lies in this, that through him we pass imperceptibly from realism to surrealism, that is to say from a state of clear consciousness in which images have distinct outlines to the unconscious, the soul, in which images are fused in that "atmosphere"—we should rather say that emotional state—in which the poet will transmit it, still warm with life. No one has known better than he how to fuse the objective outline and the inner image in such a way that everywhere reality unifies the soul while the soul animates reality. It will suffice to indicate the fusion of the two elements in the course of our study.

FUNDAMENTAL IMAGES

One cannot insist too much on the importance of the first edition, which is really the key to all the images that will follow. It gives the note, as it were. So it is necessary to isolate the thematic images of this work and sort them so as to bring out the gamut of the whole hymn.

I. *Creation*: It is the theme of the former life of the soul, so to speak. For Whitman fancies that the soul has a past, and this past is the theme of creation.

Whitman expresses it first of all by means of a manifest sign: the germ, the sprout which he has observed in fields and gardens.

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death.¹⁰

Between the idea of immortality and the image supplied by the sprout which turns green again every year, the poet draws a logical connection which is expressed here by the verb "shows." So this is not yet symbolism proper. To reach it, the poet must suppress the grammatical link. For instance:

Walt, you understand enough . . . why don't you let it out then?
Come now, I will not be tantalized . . . you conceive too much of
articulation.

Do you not know how the buds beneath are folded?
Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,
The dirt receding before my prophetic screams,
I underlying causes to balance them at last.¹¹

This is pure Whitman. It will be noticed how he passes from the objective image: "Do you not know how the buds beneath are folded?" to the symbolic image which represents him identified

with the germ, first in winter, then in spring, when the germ forces its way towards the light. A detailed analysis would show that each word includes a double meaning: that of the objective image, that of the symbol, for instance: "The dirt receding before my prophetical screams" is related both to the image of the seed emerging from the ground and to the notion of the errors which the poet dispels with his work. The identification is perfect. To such a degree that the image of the seed loses its reality and becomes in the next time the abstract idea of "Cause," which possesses enough universality to embrace the real and the spiritual. Hence the apparently metaphysical statement: "I underlying causes," in which one can recognize a memory of the theories of substance, but in which the main thing is the imaginative content.

Another line shows the same process: "All truths wait in all things,"¹² a formula whose imaginative content cannot be understood unless we compare it to the preceding passages in which the word "wait" already occurs: "Waiting in gloom."

Just as the poet waits in solitude and silence for the fatal moment when he will sing, the germ of truth waits for the moment which will certainly come, for "They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it."¹³

Whitman here adds an image, superimposed upon that of the waiting germ, the image of child-birth; it logically leads up to the line: "They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon."

Now, curiously enough from the point of view of the question that occupies us at present, these lines follow a short passage in which Whitman again symbolizes the notion of creation in the form of a germ. The passage in question is one of the erotic passages of *Leaves of Grass*. The sensual origin of the images cannot be doubted:

I am given up by traitors;
I talk wildly . . . I have lost my wits . . .
I and nobody else am the greatest traitor . . .
You villain touch, what are you doing . . . my breath is tight in
its throat;
Unclench your floodgates; you are too much for me.
Blind living wrestling touch, sheath'd hooded sharp-tooth'd
touch.
Did it make you ache so leaving me?
Parting track'd by arriving . . . perpetual payment of perpetual
loan,
Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterwards.

Sprouts take and accumulate . . . stand by the curb prolific and vital,
Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden.¹⁴

Whatever one may think of the chaotic accumulation of images, Whitman's instinctive mastery over words has to be recognized. A short analysis will help to understand the very clever use our poet makes of the symbolic image.

The theme is that of creation—of procreation, for Whitman does not distinguish them.

"Parting track'd by arriving" indicates by means of a familiar image the continuity of life in sexual intercourse. This idea is *immediately* (that is to say without any intermediary of any kind) expressed by a new image: "perpetual payment of perpetual loan," whose obscurity is cleared up only by the context (a further proof) that Whitman builds the whole and each image as merely an "indirection"). The ideas of richness potentially contained in this image is taken up again in the next line: "Rich showering¹⁵ and recompense richer afterwards."

Whitman was not so averse to figures of speech as he claimed since we catch him here indulging in a chiasmus, thanks to which moreover he goes on to the notion of fecundation. For the richer recompense which follows the sexual act is, to the poet's mind, the propagation of life.

We should hesitate to extract this meaning from a word obscured by its place in a lyrical context, if the theme of propagation were not familiar to our poet; so familiar that one has sometimes the impression that Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass* merely to celebrate child-birth. Here is the way Whitman's imagination describes this "richer recompense":

Sprouts take and accumulate . . . stand by the curb prolific and vital,
Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden.

We have already encountered and explained the notion of germination. This time, the image is extended; it is no longer a spear of grass or even a plant or tree which germinates and grows. It is "a landscape," a synthesis of lines and colors; it is the world of external things with its splendor and power: "Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden. . . ."

Rarely has Whitman's ecstasy reached such fullness and vividness. Rarely has sensual intoxication found such proud expression.

For the poet's aim in this line is nothing less than a suggestion of the recreation of the world through the sexual act.

One sees how Whitman's symbolism develops. "Whoever has power in his writings to draw bold startling images and strange pictures, the power to embody in language original and beautiful and quaint ideas—is a true son of song."¹⁶ These words which Whitman wrote in 1846 can be applied to himself. He then expressed consciously what under the influence of his "surrealistic" attitude he was to practice unconsciously in his work in 1855. After the theme of creation comes that of existence.

II. Existence: It is evident that whenever Whitman wants to express the mere existence of his ego, he has to do so in "indirect" terms. Whitman's ego was beyond the real, that is to say beyond words; consequently his expression can only be symbolic.

Yet, there are places where Whitman has tried to define himself directly. Let us transcribe them in the order in which they appear and see what they can teach us.

"I am the mate and companion of people,"¹⁷ which must be put side by side with an identical definition which occurs farther on: "I am a free companion . . . I bivouac by invading watchfires."¹⁸

On page 20 (of the 1855 edition) there occurs a definition which corresponds more exactly to the artist: "In me the caresser of life wherever moving."¹⁹

At times the image is suggested rather than described in detail, as when Whitman depicts himself as an orchestra:

I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and slain persons.

I sound triumphal drums for the dead—I fling through my embouchures the loudest and gayest music to them . . .²⁰

Sometimes the definition of Whitman's ego requires more delicacy and pervasive sweetness. The most significant example is to be found on page 27, when the ego of the poet is changed into an ethereal being, a spirit or ghost, a presence which only the sweetness of evening can make us feel. "I am he that walks with the tender and growing night."²¹

One might say that in this example, Whitman's ego is dissolved in an emotion. In the example which follows it resolves itself into a vital principle:

Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me . . .

I stand indifferent,

I moisten the roots of all that has grown.²²

A prophetic definition of the potentialities of the ego is to be found on page 45, where Whitman writes: "I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs."²³

How many future poems will be nothing but the unfolding of secondary images already contained in this definition!

It seems that we might attribute the same prophetic character to the following definition: "I am the teacher of athletes."²⁴

Like the former, it was grounded on the most reliable reality of the ego and, consequently, projects into the future possibilities which naturally came true.

Thus in 1856, that is to say, shortly after the appearance of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman composed for the young men of America a speech full of that energetic determination which, according to him, was to prepare a race of athletes for the United States.²⁵

Many a passage of *Leaves of Grass* shows that his ego wanted to lead men along a new road towards truth and beauty:

I am a dance . . .

I am the ever-laughing . . . it is new moon and twilight,

I see the hiding of douceurs . . . I see nimble ghosts whichever way I look,

Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and where it is neither ground nor sea . . .

Only from me can they hide nothing; and would not if they could;

I reckon I am their boss and they make me a pet besides . . .

Onward we move, a gay gang of blackguards with mirth-shouting music and wild flapping pennants of joy.²⁶

It is only when reaching the last stroke of this picture where there throbs a wild "joie de vivre," that we understand the definition of the beginning:

I am a dance . . .

I am the ever-laughing . . .

This symbol developed by a rich imagination probably indicates better than an analysis how Whitman became conscious of his deeper self. A dance, a laugh . . . that is to say what reveals to the senses the rhythm and enthusiasm of physical life. For it is through the ecstasy that comes from the mere fact of living freely that Whitman's ego best reveals itself. That is why his imagery becomes most original and significant whenever, instead of defining his ego, Whitman depicts it in action, so to speak.

III. *Action*: Action is in itself a symbol of the ego. With Whitman, of course, action should not be understood in the social sense of the word. If this kind of action is included in *Leaves of Grass*, we know that it is merely a residue of his public life. But this kind of activity does not represent the true action of the deeper self. Let us bear in mind the fact that the latter has definitely deserted the realm of clear consciousness. Whitman's ego no longer knows the meaning of good, evil, heaven and hell. It is indifferent.²⁷ Its field of action is the unconscious. There it lives intensely an immense and throbbing life. It is this action alone that interests us here; it is the only one that allowed of symbolic treatment.

Yet, even in the realm of unconscious imagination, there are several planes. We can distinguish two when examining *Leaves of Grass* from the point of view of symbolism.

a) The passages where Whitman's ego tries to assert its supremacy. The imagery is borrowed from war and army life, for the poet wants to impart to the reader the idea and emotion of a struggle . . .²⁸

The page in which, in reminiscent ecstasy, Whitman sings the voluptuous ascendancy of the sea and the night over his soul, is quite significant of his *defeat*:

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.
Press close bare-bosom'd night . . .
You sea, I resign myself to you also . . .²⁹

We have here the action of the ego, but, as it were, its negative action, which is quite characteristic of the nature of Whitman. The night, the sea, two infinite mediums in which his soul dilates in sterile exaltation, sterile as regards practical life, but on the contrary productive of beauty. As a matter of fact, this page is the most transposed of all in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It is one of the most characteristic of Whitman. Never has the imagery been more revealing than in this passage. One may say that Night and the Sea are the symbols in which Whitman has best expressed his soul. Wrapped up in them, his soul has conquered its supremacy.

b) When Whitman considers himself no longer as a defeated person, but as possessing all his combative power, the imagery will thrive on fresh air, the "splendid sun" and the open road. Night is all right for hiding our quiet ecstasies (which are nothing but preparations, as for a rush forward). Broad daylight is necessary for true action. . . .

All that symbolizes the notion of a free and spontaneous impulse in Whitman's eyes, flows naturally from his pen.

He sings the horse:

The gigantic beauty of a stallion . . .

Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes . . .³⁰

But it does not seem to him so fast as his soul:

Swift wind: Space! My soul! . . .

My ties and ballasts leave me . . . I travel, I sail.³¹

c) We are thus led up to the symbols which were bound to tempt Whitman's imagination, those of the ship and the bird which have always in all languages provided poets with a convenient means of expressing the irresistible and infinite yearning of their souls:

I anchor my ship for a little while only

My messengers continually cruise away . . .³²

lines which were immediately preceded by this one: "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul."

These two symbols recur with most frequency in the poems which followed the first edition. . . .

Creation, Existence, Action . . . such are the modes of Whitman's hymn. Can there be broader ones? They contain potentially all the poetic variations of mankind.

CONCLUSION

We have reached the end of our exploration. The inner workings of the mind which lead a poet one day to express in rhythms and images the anxiety that haunts him, begins as soon as the imagination awakens. The one who wishes to catch them, must neglect nothing. As it is impossible for us really to follow the first steps of the mind and senses, we have to consult with great attention the early writings, when there are any, in which these first proceedings were disclosed. In the case of Whitman, there is no lack of these writings at the present day after the patient researches which have brought them to light.

While the young artist tries to express the first gropings of his dreams, he comes into contact with reality, persons and things. It is the time when a sort of struggle begins between the soul of the poet

and society, a hidden struggle, which the latter, being a blind force does not notice, of which the former, still unaccustomed to thought is only dimly aware.

We have tried to show that the historical juncture was such that it called for all Whitman's will, but that owing to a natural bent which his manner of life strengthened, something in him kept him away from it and isolated him in a nation in which dreamy solitude was a crime. Hence in Whitman the perpetual sense of a lack of balance between society and his soul, a lack of balance that begets evil.

We have shown that this sense of evil is rooted in the inmost heart of the poet of *Leaves of Grass* and it is probably to this sense that we owe the poetical works of 1855. Sensing the germ of evil deep in his soul, Whitman has naturally dreamed of a pure and healthy life.

If Whitman has told this to the public, he has kept to himself his inner anxiety. It is on a slip found in his personal papers (the date of which seems to be 1868-1870; Whitman was then 51) that Whitman makes this disclosure: "It is imperative that I obviate and remove myself (and my orbit) at all *hazards* (away from) this incessant enormous . . . perturbation."³³

What Whitman may have suffered in his flesh and in his soul on account of this "perturbation" which isolated him, we shall probably never know. But how much more human the man and the poet now become! How far we are from the prophet satisfied with himself and the world whom his blind friends insisted on seeing in Whitman. It is not in disparagement of him that we tear away the veils that a patient friendship had woven round his face. Here are his infinitely soft and sad eyes, but they are true eyes with the glint of life in them. Here is his skin, with the marks left by caresses, those of the sun and sea air, but also those of human hands and lips. Here is his whole person "that attracts and repels at the same time." His voice sings, stops on the verge of confidence. A sort of shame envelops it. And a great pride.

"We did not like his hat," said Bucke. Yet, it was the sign of his manly pride. His friends would have liked to violate Whitman's solitude. To some extent, their desire was legitimate. But there was a limit which they never overstepped. This Quaker hat always on his head in the Quaker fashion meant that Whitman would recognize no other will than his own. This will plunged its roots into the very flesh of his being. And there it drew a sap which, if it produced

the poetical flowers that we admire, nevertheless separated Whitman from his fellow-men forever. The penalty of genius probably.

But what an extraordinary undertaking! Here we have a work meant to draw all men together, and it has its source in a heart's loneliness.

. . . the yearning and swelling heart,

Affection that will not be gainsay'd, the sense of what is real, the thought if after all it should prove unreal,

The doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-time . . .³⁴

Who would not hear in such words the murmurings of a heart? It is there rather than in the hymns that the truth lies.

The work he had dreamed of is not complete: the *Leaves of Grass* of 1855 are only a "prelude," as he said. The love he felt for man, the self-pity he transferred to the others; his enthusiasm for physical life, the workings of existence, all this he thought he had sufficiently expressed. He realized he had reached a poetic form which was his own. He said so in his Preface: "The expression of the American poet is . . . indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic . . . the theme is creative and has vista."³⁵ We have shown that this is poetic symbolism and that herein lies both the strength and novelty of Whitman. Here also lay, for the poet, the solution of the problem of his own existence.

We trust that in the measure that "the ineffable grace of dying days"³⁶ came to him, Whitman forgot his sufferings. Of his childhood and adolescence, there remained nothing but sweet reminiscences and beautiful images. Death would merge the disharmonies of his days, Death with "the beautiful touch,"³⁷ the Death he had so often called upon with all the unconscious forces of his being, for in death the "health" and "silence" for which he had craved all his life would at last be realized.

Notes

¹Preface to 1855 Edition, *Leaves of Grass, Inclusive Edition*, p. 491.

²"Warble for lilac-time," *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 318-319.

³*Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴"Warble for Lilac-Time," *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁵*L'art romantique*, p. 11.

⁶E. Holloway, "Whitman Manuscript," *American Mercury*, vol. III, pp. 475-480, Dec. 1924.

⁷"The whole visible universe is nothing but a shop of images and signs to which imagination will assign a relative place and value; it is a sort of food which imagination must digest and transform . . ." *L'art romantique*, p. 14.

⁸"Starting from Paumanok," §19, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 23.

⁹Preface to 1855 Edition, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 491.

¹⁰"Song of Myself," §6, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 29.

¹¹"Song of Myself," §25, *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²"Song of Myself," §30, 1.1, *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³"Song of Myself," §30, *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁴"Song of Myself," §28, 29, *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁵"Showering": Whitman makes rather too frequent use of this image.

¹⁶*Brooklyn Eagle*, June 13, 1846.

¹⁷"Song of Myself," §7, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 29.

¹⁸"Song of Myself," §33, *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁹"Song of Myself," §13, *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁰"Song of Myself," §18, *Ibid.*, p. 38 and 561.

²¹"Song of Myself," §21, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²²"Song of Myself," §22, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 42.

²³"Song of Myself," §41, 1.1, *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁴"Song of Myself," §47, 1.1, *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁵*The Eighteenth Presidency*.

²⁶"The Sleepers," §1, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 356.

²⁷"I stand indifferent," "Song of Myself."

²⁸Cf. "Song of Myself," §28, *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 48-49.

²⁹"Song of Myself," §21, 22, *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

³⁰"Song of Myself," §32, *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹"Song of Myself," §33, *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 571.

³²"Song of Myself," §33, *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³³*Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, vol. II, p. 95.

³⁴"There Was a Child Went Forth," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 307.

³⁵"Preface to 1855 Edition," *Complete Writings*, vol. 5, p. 163.

³⁶"Song of Myself," §45, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 69.

³⁷"A Song of Joy," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 140.

Rhythm and Language in the First Edition of *Leaves of Grass**

By Jean Catel

Translated by Roger Asselineau

THERE IS SOMETIMES A difference between what a writer wants to do or thinks he does and what he actually achieves. The case of Whitman is curious in this respect.

In his Notes and prose writings, Whitman declared that he was creating a new kind of oratory: and yet *Leaves of Grass* is poetry.

Leaves of Grass is poetry: and yet it contains all the devices of oratory.

So Whitman's work in 1855 presents the problem of a creation half way between Rhetoric and Versification. We should be bewildered and, like some critics, be entitled to assert that Whitman's work in 1855 is a "monster," if the history of humanity did not afford fairly numerous instances of this intermediate form. Let us first of all rule out a possible confusion: we do not mean here a form which would borrow its various devices from rhetorical prose on the one hand and poetry on the other. Such a form (which admittedly exists in all literature) is too artificial for a spontaneous artist—such as Whitman—to attempt to develop it and use it. No, we do mean an autonomous mode of expression endued with eternal characteristics and bringing into contact these two things which, in all literatures, tend to evolve separately, the oral language (what we have just called rhetoric) and versification. Let us say also in Robert de Souza's words: "It would be preferable that poetry should not lose even the forms it has in common with the other modes of expression. . . . Why should not the poet take hold of this movement to make it more intense and so more powerful?"¹ This contact between language and poetry will be renewed through means which he succinctly indicates: "a visible structure, a fluent tone, an easy syntax, muscled rhythms, and what one should not leave to oratory alone: breath." It is noteworthy that Whitman rediscovered all this in 1855 at a time when, as perhaps in Europe today, poetry aspired to come to life again thanks to what de Souza calls "the direct action of the voice."

*From Jean Catel's *Rythme et Langage dans la première édition des Leaves of Grass*, Paris, 1930, pp. 153-155 (Conclusion).

The direct action of the voice . . . by this he meant the abandonment of the conquests made by prosody at the expense of the vocal spontaneity of language. Is this what Whitman's example and the advice of such technicians as R. de Souza propose to poets? A harking back to the past? As far as Whitman is concerned there can be no doubt about it; he has said on many occasions what he considered as "great poetry."² Let us quote one passage out of many: ". . . really great poetry is always (like the Homeric or Biblical Canticles) the result of a national spirit, and not the privilege of a polish'd and select few . . ."³

Another passage confides to us that "the altitude of literature and poetry has always been religion—and always will be. The Indian Vedas, the Naçkas of Zoroaster, the Talmud of the Jews, the Old Testament . . . the Koran, etc., and so on toward our own day to Swedenborg."⁴ The reader knows the broad meaning which Whitman gave to the word "religion." A manuscript note throws sidelight on the matter: "In the earliest times . . . every thing written at all was poetry . . . therefore history, laws, religion, war were all in the keeping of the poet . . . Though a division and subdivision of subjects has for many centuries been made since then, it still prevails very much as in those early times, so called—Everything yet is made the subject of poetry. . . ."⁵ In other words, though the general tendency of the evolution of mankind has been towards subdivision, though in our time, laws and warfare are concepts and practices distinct from religion and the modern poet has cut out for himself a province to which the law-giver, the warrior and the priest have no access, yet "everything is made the subject of poetry" in the Homeric, Biblical and Vedic meaning of the word.

We must now be more explicit. Let us say first of all that side by side with the full-grown language, that is to say the written language (with the grammatical logic and mathematical abstraction which it demands), Whitman conceives and recommends an oral language, orally transmitted, which he calls poetry.

Notes

¹*L'Heure nous tient*, Paris, 1926, préliminaire, p. 9.

²"A Backward Glance," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 536.

³"A Backward Glance," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 536.

⁴*Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, vol. 5, p. 136 n.

⁵*Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, vol. 2, p. 76.

Whitman's Fundamental Aesthetics*

By Roger Asselineau

Translated by the Author

WHITMAN'S AESTHETICS FOLLOWS quite naturally from his mysticism. For in poetry he saw above all the expression of the supreme truths which had been revealed to him. So, though he took pleasure in reading Homer, Shakespeare and Walter Scott's narrative poems, he conceived no other poetry but lyric poetry. As to the novels whose aim is mere entertainment, he had nothing but contempt for them.¹ To his mind, the purpose of any literature worthy of the name is not to entertain but to bring the reader's soul into contact with the soul of the world. He never diverged from that opinion. The Preface to the 1855 Edition expresses the same views as the *Democratic Vistas* of 1871 and the essay on "Poetry to-day in America," which he published ten years later and took up again in 1892 in his *Complete Works*.² The poet is he who "sees the farthest" and "has the most faith."³ The great man of letters (in the Carlylean meaning of the term) is known by "his limitless faith in God, his reverence and by the absence in him of doubt . . ."⁴; he deciphers nature, "the only complete, actual poem, existing calmly in the divine scheme, containing all, content, careless of the criticisms of the day or these endless and wordy chatterers"; he is conscious of the existence of "the soul, the permanent identity, the thought, the something . . . that fully satisfies. . . . That something is the All, and the idea of All, with the accompanying idea of eternity, and of itself, the soul, buoyant, indestructible, sailing space forever, visiting every region, as a ship the sea"; he feels life circulating through all things, "the pulsations in all matter, all spirit, throbbing forever—the eternal beats, eternal systole and diastole of life in things . . .," and he thus knows that neither the soul nor matter ever die.⁵

In other words, for Whitman, the poet is essentially a seer⁶ and a prophet in the broad meaning of the word, such as he defines it himself in *Specimen Days*: "The word prophecy is much misused; it seems narrow'd to prediction merely—That is not the main sense of the Hebrew word translated 'prophet'; it means one whose mind bubbles up and pours forth as a fountain, from inner, divine spon-

*From Roger Asselineau, *L'Evolution de Walt Whitman après la première édition des Feuilles d'Herbe*, Paris: Didier, 1954, pp. 372-388.

taneities revealing God . . . The great matter is to reveal and outpour the God-like suggestions pressing forth in the soul. This is briefly the doctrine of the Friends or Quakers."⁷ He is near not only to the doctrine of the Quakers, but also to the romantic⁸—and transcendentalist⁹—conception of the visionary poet. The poet whom he called up in his Preface to the 1855 Edition and whom he intended to become, is in relation to mankind what sight is in relation to man, he sees eternity latent in men and women¹⁰ and his glance pierces the future; "he places himself where the future becomes present."¹¹ Like the Old Testament prophets, he leads his fellow-countrymen in war-time and shakes their inertia in peace-time.¹²

Whitman's ambition in 1855 was still higher; his rival and model was Christ. Indeed, in the first version of *Leaves of Grass*, he introduces himself as the successor and even as a reincarnation of the Messiah.¹³ He too brings a message of solace to the poor (and to all social outcasts),¹⁴ and, like Christ he leads his disciples along the open roads of the world,¹⁵ and stops from time to time to preach to the crowd that follows him:

A call in the midst of the crowd,
My own voice, orotund sweeping and final.
Come my children,
Come my boys and girls . . .¹⁶

He leans over the slave at work in the cotton-fields or the servant who has just cleaned the privies, and puts on his cheek the kiss of peace.¹⁷ He visits the sick as they pant on their beds, and outbidding all "the old cautious hucksters" of religions who preceded him,¹⁸ he brings to all the good news that death and evil are mere illusions and all shall be saved. What is more, he works miracles and restores the dying:

To any one dying I speed and twist the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,
Let the physician and priest go home.
I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will . . .
I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell
you is so.¹⁹

It was probably at that time that he proposed to write a new Bible to be finished in 1859 which was to include 365 parts, in order that the faithful might have one text to read and meditate upon

every day.²⁰ He even thought for a time of writing a new burial service.²¹

This exaltation, however, was to subside fairly soon and such lyrical exaggerations are no longer to be found in later editions. Though it still occurred to him to treat Christ as an equal in 1860 in "To Him that was Crucified,"²² he would most of the time, from then on, give up posing as the saviour of mankind and the founder of a new religion. He was now merely one prophet among many others, the John the Baptist who announces the coming of poets greater than himself: "I announce greater offspring, orators, days, and then depart."²³

In 1872, wishing to reaffirm ostentatiously his faith in the future of Democracy, he prophesied again (in the narrow meaning of the word), but he did so with modesty and without claiming any supernatural powers:

Now trumpeter for thy close . . .

Rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of the future,
Give me for once its prophecy and joy.²⁴

He now introduced himself as a mere precursor of the "re-splendent coming literati," "sacerdotal bards" and "kosmic savans" who would adorn the democracy of the future.²⁵ This moderation surprises after the bombast and pretentiousness of his first poems. It can probably be accounted for by the decline of his forces and it is likely that it was imposed upon him by the hard lessons of life and the relative failure of his work. This belated modesty did not prevent his first disciples, R. M. Bucke, Traubel, etc. from considering *Leaves of Grass* as the Bible of Democracy and the Holy Book of a new civilization.²⁶ Whitman himself, though more and more reserved as regards his personal role, preserved nevertheless, even to the end of his life, his belief in the quasi-sacred character of the poet as the successor of the prophets and priests in modern society. "There will soon be no more priests—Their work is done . . . A superior breed shall take their place,"²⁷ he affirmed in 1855, and in 1871 he repeated in *Democratic Vistas*: "The priest departs, the divine literatus comes,"²⁸ taking up again on his own responsibility the theory which Carlyle had set forth in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. In his opinion literature was the supreme art which was destined to supplant and supersede religion. This borrowed idea, which became one of the main themes of *Democratic Vistas*,²⁹ is the principle that guided all his life and inspired all his work.³⁰

Besides, as befits a mystic, Whitman was deeply convinced of the divine character of his inspiration. When he wrote, it seemed to him that he was "divinely possessed, blind to all subordinate affairs and given up entirely to the surgings and utterances of the mighty tempestuous demon" that was in him.³¹ At such times, he can only scream "electric" and deliver "curious envelop'd messages"; he has no will left, he is no longer conscious and acts passively, "[his] commission obeying, to question it never daring."³² He is merely a medium.³³ "The poets," he wrote in the margin of an article on poetry, "are the divine mediums—through them come spirits and materials to all the people, men and women."³⁴ His songs, he asserted, spring "from . . . irresistible impulses"³⁵ "as total and irresistible as those which make the sea flow, or the globe revolve."³⁶ As he grew older, of course, his inspiration gradually lost its strength and became short-winded, his poems become rarer and shorter; in 1876, after his illness, he even used the past tense to speak of his work, as if it were completed,³⁷ and in his "Prayer of Columbus," he utters a cry of doubt: "Is it the prophet's thought, I speak, or am I raving?"³⁸

This failing, however, was short-lived and soon overcome, for in his preface of that year, he congratulated himself precisely on never having repudiated, when winter came, the songs which his soul had dictated to him during the summer months.³⁹ And he never really doubted the authenticity of his inspiration. In 1881, in "Spirit that form'd this scene," he even affirmed that the force which created the world and the one which created his poems are akin.⁴⁰ Besides, up to the time of his death, he lent an attentive ear to the increasingly tenuous voice of his inspiration and piously collected its most trivial utterances.

The inspired poet is thus one of the elect of God, but, as for Whitman there exist close connections between the spirit and the body, between spiritual purity and physical beauty;⁴¹ the poet is not only a person endowed with a superior spirituality, he is also a man of an impeccable "physiology," who has received from nature "the soundest organic health" and a vigorous, well-fed body assimilating food perfectly.⁴² Consequently, it is incumbent upon him to keep this choice organism in a state of grace and he must therefore observe certain rules of physical and moral hygiene.

In this respect, Whitman's aesthetics is inseparable from his ethics and, his spiritualism being inextricably mixed up with his materialism, his prescriptions concern the body as well as the soul. He attempted very early to formulate a certain number of rules of

conduct meant to secure health and longevity.⁴³ Numerous are the newspaper articles which he devoted to this subject in the *Brooklyn Eagle* and in the *Brooklyn Times*. He believed neither in medicine nor in drugs; he put all his hope in hygiene and sport. Under the influence of the Fowler brothers, he recommended his readers to look after the cleanliness of their bodies and bathe frequently. You gain a fine complexion by it, he declared, and a feeling of great physical well-being. "A lightness and elasticity—a dissolving away of all heaviness or dullness of spirits—a buoyancy become a habit of mind and body in the bather."⁴⁴ His enthusiasm shows that he was speaking from experience. And for the same reason he advised his contemporaries to go in for athletics.⁴⁵ Did not he at that time swim every day after his day's work?⁴⁶ Furthermore, according to Peter Doyle,⁴⁷ he never smoked and drank very little. Though he had not always been so abstemious,⁴⁸ it is probable that, on the whole, he was quite temperate and that he was sincere when he wrote *Franklin Evans*—what he said about it later was only for fear of being laughed at.⁴⁹

According to him, the strict observance of all these precepts enabled one to preserve his health and, in the poet's opinion, health was of supreme importance. "The Egyptian priests," he noted, "(the Greeks also) regarded the preservation of health as a point of the first importance and indispensably necessary to the practice of piety and the service of the Gods."⁵⁰ For, without health, there is no "magnetism," that is to say no spiritual power, no inspiration, no effulgence and, consequently, no poet.⁵¹

This physical hygiene, however, does not suffice; the poet must also conform his life to very strict moral rules. For poetry is a priestly function which demands complete self-denial. Whoever wants to serve it, must give up the pursuit of wealth and take a vow of poverty.

"You shall not heap what is call'd riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve,"⁵²

he recommended to his disciples in 1856, and he himself put into practice this ethic of absolute disinterestedness. He could have made a fortune as a contractor; he preferred to follow his vocation instead. As a journalist, he always refused to sacrifice his convictions to his career. During the Civil War, instead of trying to make money, he devoted himself to the service of the wounded and then was content with a modest clerkship in a government department.

As a poet, lastly, he could rightly claim in 1876 that he had "never composed with eye on the book-market, nor for fame, nor for any pecuniary profit,"⁵³ for, right to the end, in spite of attacks and entreaties, he maintained in his book, making scarcely any changes, the audacities of language and thought which hampered the sale and diffusion of his work. He never had any other needs than those which he had defined in 1855: ". . . a little sum laid aside for burial money and . . . a few clapboards around and shingle overhead on a lot of American soil owned, and the easy dollars that supply the year's plain clothing and meals."⁵⁴ He always lived very frugally in almost miserable houses. His tomb was his only luxury. But this contempt for riches and this self-imposed poverty were, to his mind, the indispensable condition of the greatness of his poetry. "Words follow character, nativity, independence, individuality," he thought.⁵⁵ So he had to some extent to sacrifice his life to his work. He accepted this form of asceticism without any regret.⁵⁶

This austerity and this sense of greatness are found again on the plane of pure aesthetics. For he despised that imaginative faculty which Wordsworth and Coleridge have called "fancy"⁵⁷ and had nothing but contempt for ingenious images, far-fetched comparisons and super-added ornaments—as well as for all exclusively narrative poetry. "The theory and practice of poets," he wrote in 1856, "have hitherto been to select certain ideas or events or personages, then describe them in the best manner they could, always with as much ornaments as the case allowed. Such are not the theory and practice of the new poet."⁵⁸

"He possesses the superiority of genuineness over fiction and romance,"⁵⁹ he stated in a poem of the same year. So, according to him, the poet must celebrate the present and not the past, the real and not the imaginary. He will insist on this idea to the very end and revert to it in 1888: "For grounds for *Leaves of Grass*, as a poem, I abandon'd the conventional themes, which do not appear in it: none of the stock ornamentation, or choice plots of love and war, or high, exceptional personages of Old World song: nothing, as I may say, for beauty's sake—no legend, or myth, or romance, nor euphemism . . ."⁶⁰ Nothing is truer, except that, as he grew older, his repugnance to "fancy" decreased and he had recourse to its good services in some of his poems, in particular in 1860 in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," in which he personified the mocking-bird and made him speak exactly as a poet of the old school would have done. He proceeded in the same manner in 1876 in "Song of

the Redwood-Tree" and in 1888 in "The Voice of the Rain," which recalls "The Cloud" of Shelley. Besides, in numerous poems, he personified America, which he sometimes even called "Columbia," for beauty's sake probably.⁶¹ He went even further. In 1871, in his "Song of the Exposition," he called upon the Muse whom he invited to leave Greece to come and live in the United States.⁶²

These, however, are only minor departures from the rules which he had laid down for himself. On the whole, he remained faithful to the aesthetics which he had defined at the beginning of his career, and the prime mover of his work is less the "fancy" which he condemned than a faculty which he thought was new and called "the Kosmic Spirit"⁶³—it was nothing else than Wordsworth's and Coleridge's "imagination." Here is how he defined it himself:

I will not make poems with reference to parts,

But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble,

And I will not sing with reference to a day, but with reference to all days . . .⁶⁴

All must have reference to the ensemble of the world . . .

There shall be no subject but it shall be treated with reference to the ensemble of the world and the compact truth of the world.⁶⁵

In other words, he wants the least object in his poems to imply and call up the rest of the world and suggest the infinity of space and time, as in the following passage:

O the gleesome saunter over fields and hillsides!

The leaves and flowers of the commonest weeds . . .⁶⁶

which recalls Wordsworth's

To me the meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.⁶⁷

He seems to have become more and more clearly conscious of the cosmic quality of his poems, for the two fragments that we have quoted above, in which he so plainly defined his intentions, both date from 1860, but, as early as 1855, he already mentioned among the qualities of the poet a "perfect sense of the oneness of nature"⁶⁸ and declared that "any thing is but a part."⁶⁹

Even in his first poems there occur striking examples of this desire for spatial and temporal ubiquity. Again and again in the "Song of Myself," his imagination soars beyond the data of his senses and reveals to him the infinity of space and time; he then

draws up ecstatic inventories of all the sights of the world⁷⁰; and he did the same thing in 1856 in such poems as "Salut au Monde" and "Song of the Broad-Axe." In 1860, he exclaimed:

O to realize space!

The plentousness of all, that there are no bounds,

To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and moon and flying clouds, as one with them.⁷¹

and "great thoughts of space and eternity fill" him; he thinks of all the globes of the past and the future, of the immensity of the universe.⁷² Yet, as he grew older, the dimensions both of his subjects and of his poems shrank. He needed no less than the whole earth at the beginning of his career; in his old age, he was satisfied with a flower, a bird, a street, a printer's case—and a few lines.⁷³ And yet, these humble vignettes still imply and suggest the rest of the world in the manner of the Japanese haikus of the best period. "The first dandelion" reminds us of the everlastingness of life, the canary in its cage celebrates the "joie de vivre" in its own way; all mankind walks up and down Broadway and the "font of type" contains in latent form all the passions of men. His imagination has lost its former vigor, but his glance has remained as piercing as ever and his sight still carries to the utmost confines of the universe:

Distances balk'd . . .

I feel the sky, the prairies vast—I feel the mighty northern lakes,
I feel the ocean and the forest—somehow I feel the globe itself
swift-swimming in space . . .⁷⁴

he exclaimed as late as 1890.

This cosmic sense was probably natural to him, but he seems to have cultivated it systematically—for the following note has been found in his papers: "First of all prepare for study by the following self teaching exercises. Abstract yourself from this book; realize where you are at present located, the point you stand that is now to you the centre of all. Look up overhead, think of space stretching out, think of all the unnumbered orbs wheeling safely there, invisible to us by day, some visible by night . . . Spend some minutes faithfully in this exercise. Then again realize yourself upon the earth, at the particular point you now occupy. Which way stretches the north, and what countries, seas, etc.? Which way the south? Which way the east? Which way the west? Seize these firmly in your mind, pass freely over immense distances. Turn your face a moment thither. Fix definitely the direction and the idea of the distances of

separate sections of your own country, also of England, the Mediterranean Sea, Cape Horn, the North Pole, and such like distinct places.”⁷⁵ These are true spiritual exercises which he practised in order to reach a state of grace; they show to what extent he strove never to forget the existence around him of the infinite space of the universe. When, in his poems, he draws up long inventories of things, towns, rivers—“catalogues,” as they are usually called—his aim is probably the same. He simply tries to make us realize the immensity of the world; he does so to warm up his imagination, and ours.⁷⁶

Science, in this respect, was a great help to him—and this is one of the reasons why he greeted it as the help-mate of poetry: “Without being a Scientist, I have thoroughly adopted the conclusions of the great Savans and Experimentalists of our time, and of the last hundred years, and they have interiorly tinged the chyle of all my verse, for purposes beyond. Following the Modern Spirit, the real Poems of the Present, ever solidifying and expanding into the Future, must vocalize the vastness and splendor and reality with which Science has invested Man and the Universe (all that is called Creation,) and must henceforth launch Humanity into new orbits, consonant with that vastness, splendor and reality, (unknown to the old poems) . . .”⁷⁷

Astronomy in particular opened endless vistas to his mind: “All the vastness of Astronomy—and space—systems of suns [blank in the MS] carried in their computation to the farthest that figures are able or that the broadest? mathematical faculty can hold . . .”⁷⁸ On the other hand, geology and astronomy combined gave him a sense of the immensity of time—a sense which few writers have possessed to the same degree.⁷⁹ He felt suspended in space between two infinites: the dark past of the geological eras whose duration is measured in millions of years and the endless and glorious future which mankind was entering with confidence, sure as it was of the ultimate triumph of democracy and science.⁸⁰

“[I am] a novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons,”⁸¹ he proclaimed in 1855. In 1891, in two of his last poems, he called up the long line of epics and sacred books which, since the remotest times, had prepared the coming of *Leaves of Grass* and, in the same way, he imagined the centuries and centuries that would elapse before his book at last should triumph.⁸² So to his death, he was conscious of the infinity of time as well as of the infinity of space. His cosmic sense inspired him right to the end of his life.

In this poetic universe of his in which every thing is an inseparable part of the Whole, all that exists is a wonderful miracle which one never tires of contemplating:

The bull and the bug never worshipp'd half enough,
Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd . . .⁸³

For nothing is contemptible; his "imagination" confers on the most trivial object a greatness which escapes those who forget the cosmic context of which it is a part:

. . . the majesty and beauty of the world are latent
in any iota of the world . . .⁸⁴

And this is another justification of the "catalogues." They may tire the reader, but they never tired their author, who inserted whole pages of them in his poems—at least until 1860—after which date they disappeared. A disappearance to which little attention has been paid so far, but which probably corresponds to the decline of his faculty of wonder. From this date on, he could write a poem only after a shock—until then his subject was the world, the "ensemble," and he descended from the whole to the parts. From now on, he could reascend from the parts to the whole only when a part had particularly struck him. His cosmic sense was unchanged, his vision of the world was the same, but his sensibility, like any human sensibility, had gradually been worn out by habit. Such wear and tear is inevitable and, in his case, was connected with the decrease of his mystic joys and the decline of his vitality. The difference is obvious if one compares, for instance, "Miracles," which was composed in 1856, to "The Commonplace," which dates from 1891. The subject is fundamentally the same; his purpose, in both cases, is to celebrate the wonderful beauty of everyday things. But, while in the first poem the most commonplace words vibrate with joy and suggest intense sensations, the second, in spite of a lyrical start, soon founders in trivial generalities and never succeeds in moving us.

At any rate, this comparison shows that his conception of beauty never varied, even if he perceived it more rarely and less strongly, as he grew older. Beauty for him was not the exclusive attribute of things endowed with harmonious proportions. True, he was sensitive to plastic beauty and in "Song of Myself" he has described with a sculptor's enthusiasm the perfect body of a negro teamster at work,⁸⁵ but, generally speaking, he conceives beauty not as an aesthetic value, but as a mystic property. He even condemns

what he calls "the beauty disease," and he adopted as his own Baudelaire's protest against art for art's sake and aestheticism.⁸⁶ Beauty, for him, is inherent in all that exists.⁸⁷ "Each precise object or condition or combination or process exhibits a beauty . . . the multiplication table its—old age its—the carpenter's trade its—the grand opera its . . . the huge-hulled clean-shaped New-York clipper at sea under steam or full sail gleams with unmatched beauty."⁸⁸ The whole being beautiful and the parts interdependent and inseparable from the whole, every thing (or being) cannot but be beautiful. The great merit of his art is precisely to rehabilitate the humblest scenes by surrounding them with a halo of infinity. Thus he does not forget, and does not allow us to forget, that the knife-grinder "sharpening a great knife" at his wheel in the street is nothing but "an unminded point set in a vast surrounding."⁸⁹ Hence the greatness and vastness of his *Leaves of Grass*, and its superiority, according to him, over all the poems which preceded it.⁹⁰

Besides imagination, there is another faculty which in Whitman's eyes is indispensable to the poet; it is sympathy. He introduces himself as "he attesting sympathy"⁹¹ and, according to him, whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud.⁹²

He means by this that the poet must always feel mysteriously connected to the "locations of times," "forms, colors, densities, odors,"⁹³ which are the concrete manifestations of universal life. In relation to nature, sympathy is the mystic perception of the spiritual reality which lies hidden behind material appearances, or, what amounts more or less to the same thing, the consciousness of the projection of the subject's soul on the objects which are perceived. Very early, before 1855 probably, Whitman had read in a review the following sentence: "The mountains, rivers, forests, and all the elements that gird them round about, would be only blank conditions of matter, if the mind did not fling its own divinity around them." Whitman was so much struck by this that he wrote in the margin: "This I think is one of the most indicative sentences I ever read."⁹⁴ And in 1891 he expressed exactly the same idea in a short poem:

Grand is the seen . . .

But grander far the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing all those . . .

(What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul? of what amount without thee?)⁹⁵

This sympathy also implies, especially towards mankind, a total acceptance of all that is, since all things have an equal right to exist:

. . . nothing in its place is bad . . .

He [the poet] judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling round a helpless thing . . .⁹⁶

In this respect, Whitman's main objection to Wordsworth was that he lacked that universal sympathy towards men,⁹⁷ which made Whitman for his part "appoint an appointment" with a prostitute in a poem that he never disowned in spite of all attacks.⁹⁸ In 1888, he again emphatically affirmed the existence of what he called "continuities,"⁹⁹ by which he meant the mystic solidarity of all things and the deep underlying unity of all that is beyond the diversity of appearances. Thus, his sympathy, like his imagination, remained alive right to the end.

Yet, in spite of his universal tolerance, he could not help harboring personal preferences and occasionally showing his disapproval. He could even be quite violent at times, as when he wrote "The Eighteenth Presidency" and his "Boston Ballad." But he never published the former and thought for a time of suppressing the latter; he preserved it in his book only at the urgent entreaty of Trowbridge.¹⁰⁰ As to his "Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness,"¹⁰¹ whose tone is so bitterly ironical, he removed it from *Leaves of Grass* after 1876, at the same time that he cancelled the satirical allusions which occurred at the beginning of his "Song of the Exposition."¹⁰² It must be added that he periodically made a resolution to abstain from sarcasm. Thus, on November 25, 1868, he noted on a slip of paper: "No more attempts at smart sayings or scornful criticisms, or harsh comments, on persons, or actions, or private and public affairs." Again on July 15, 1870: "Never attempt puns or plays upon words, or utter sarcastic comments."¹⁰³ He kept his word on the whole, since there are hardly any left in *Leaves of Grass* now.¹⁰⁴ He thus succeeded in preserving the purely lyrical character of his inspiration.

So, to all intents and purposes, Whitman's aesthetics is the logical outcome of his mystic intuitions and the faithful reflection of his pantheistic metaphysics. He became more and more clearly conscious of its implications and put its principles into practice until his death—but his body gradually betrayed him and the last edition of *Leaves of Grass* has neither the glamour nor the power of

the first ones. The same "cosmic spirit" pervades all his work, but, as years went by, his exaltation declined progressively and his wondering gaze became accustomed to the glory of the world.

Notes

¹Cf. "Democratic Vistas," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Malcolm Cowley, vol. II, pp. 244, 245.

²Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 295-309 or *Prose Works*, 1892, pp. 288-301. This essay was first published in the *North American Review* in Feb. 1881 under the title of "The Poetry of the Future."

³*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. V, or Emory Holloway's *Inclusive Edition*, p. 492. Cf. also his "Letter to R. W. Emerson," *Leaves of Grass*, 1856, p. 346: "I am a man who has perfect faith."

"Democratic Vistas," *Complete Poetry and Prose*, vol. II, p. 250.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁶He uses the word himself in the Preface to the 1855 Edition; cf. *Inclusive Edition*, p. 492.

⁷"Death of Thomas Carlyle," *Specimen Days*, 1882, p. 168 or *Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, vol. II, p. 168.

⁸Cf. Denis Saurat, *La religion de Victor Hugo*, Paris, 1929. This romantic conception in fact goes back a long way and is rooted in the occultist tradition; cf. Auguste Viatte, *Les Sources occultes du Romantisme*, Paris, 1928. Whitman was familiar with the works of the English Romantics and, above all, had encountered in George Sand's novels figures of inspired poets that had deeply struck him; cf. Esther Shephard, *Walt Whitman's Pose*. Another possible influence is that of a joint-review of Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* and of W. Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*, which one D. W. W. published in 1851, probably in an American magazine. This review is now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, and Whitman has underlined, now in ink, now in pencil (which proves that he has read it several times and mused upon it) the following passages: "An age without its gifted inventor, without its law-giver, without its poet, must live over the old life, walk by hearsay, and subsist on imitation. We have at least dumb consciousness that our well-being on this planet depends upon our insight into the nature of our existence, and we are always ready to ask help of him whose vision is clearer than our own. We welcome therefore the true seer. He is eyes for the world; he is the true keeper of keepers." (Cf. Preface to 1855 Edition, *Inclusive Edition*, p. 492) "Foremost among

these is the true poet. He is an intuitive seer; something more than a seer. Novalis says 'The fresh gaze of a child is richer in significance than the forecasting of the most indubitable seer.' The poet is the full-grown child." "The mere verse-maker—the artisan working with imitative skill—is a king of gypsey (*sic*) wanderer, homeless, friendless, and to Apollo's household, worthless, while the true poet, the artist is at length housed in the affections, warmed in the bosom of love. . . ." "An age of imitation never recognizes the inspired teacher who is true to man in being true to his own nature. Just so far as the spirit of the times is false will the true poet be neglected. The one who tacks to catch the popular breeze may run with great rapidity—alas, not often heavenwards. When the multitude are repenting, woe to those who have received their greatest furors, and joy to those who have raised heroic and prophetic voices of warning and guidance! Happy the age in which a strong, devout soul converses with the Spirit of the Universe in the hearing of men! Words of bitterness and of jest may be thoughtlessly uttered, but many shall learn to worship." "He is the eye of the universe, giving expression to its otherwise boundless void. . . ." "We find no splendid images that rouse the unholy passions of our nature." (Here Whitman has put an exclamation mark in the margin.) "Every real poet, however, is necessarily metaphysical." "He announces but does not prove, he combines, but does not analyse."

In all these sentences Whitman could recognize himself or find an encouragement.

⁹Cf. Emerson's essays on "The Transcendentalist" and "The Poet."

¹⁰"What the eyesight does to the rest, he does to the rest." *Inclusive Edition*, p. 492; "he sees eternity in men and women," *ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 495.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 491.

¹³*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 43, or *Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," p. 61, §38, 1.5-11.

¹⁴*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, pp. 57-58 or *Inclusive Edition*, "A Song for Occupations," pp. 179, 180, §1.

¹⁵*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, pp. 51-52 or *Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," pp. 70-71, par. 46.

¹⁶*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 46 or *Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," pp. 64-65, §42.

¹⁷*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 45 or *Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," p. 63, §40, 1.17-19.

¹⁸*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 45 or *Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," p. 63, § 41, 1.7.

¹⁹*Inclusive Edition*, "Song of Myself," p. 63, §40, v. 22-34.

²⁰"The great construction of the New Bible. Not to be diverted from the principal object—the main life work—the three hundred and sixty-five. It ought to be ready in 1859. (June '57)" *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 6, p. 6 (4).

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

²²*Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 397 or *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 322-323.

²³*Leaves of Grass*, 1860, "So Long!" p. 451 (1) or *Inclusive Edition* p. 702, var. (after 1. 1); cf. also var. (after 1. 8).

²⁴"The Mystic Trumpeter," *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free*, 1872, p. II or *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 391-392, §§, 1. 1, 4-5.

²⁵"Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," *As a Strong Bird . . .*, p. 5, or *Inclusive Edition*, p. 382, §5, 1. 39.

²⁶R. M. Bucke, *Walt Whitman*, pp. 183-185.

²⁷"Preface to 1855 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 505.

²⁸"Democratic Vistas," *Complete Poetry and Prose*, vol. II, p. 210.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 211-212, 242-244.

³⁰He said so himself in 1888: "I think Literature—a new superb, democratic literature—is to be the medicine and lever, and (with Art) the chief influence in modern civilization. I have myself not so much made a dead set at this theory, or attempted to present it directly, as admitted it to color and sometimes dominate what I had to say." Preface to "Democratic Vistas" with other papers—"English Edition," *ibid.*, p. 447.

³¹*Walt Whitman's Workshop*, 1928, p. 37.

³²"So Long!" *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 454 (17) or *Inclusive Edition* p. 417, 1.36, 39, 41.

³³"Chants Democratic, n°16," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 189 or "Mediums," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 399.

³⁴Written in the margin of an article on "Modern Poetry and Poets" preserved in the Library of Duke University. (*Catalogue of the Trent Collection*, p. 74).

³⁵"Leaves of Grass n°20," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 239 or "So far and so far, and on toward the end," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 475, 1.2.

³⁶"Preface to 1872 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 507.

³⁷"Preface to 1876 Edition," *Ibid.*, pp. 518-519.

³⁸"Prayer of Columbus," *Two Rivulets*, 1876, p. 23 or *Inclusive Edition*, p. 353, 1.56.

³⁹Cf. n. 37.

⁴⁰“Leaves of Grass, 1881, p. 368 or *Inclusive Edition*, p. 403.

⁴¹Cf. “Faces” and “The Sleepers.”

⁴²“Preface to 1855 Edition,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 501.

⁴³After Whitman’s death, Harned published under the title of “Whitman and Physique” (*Conservator*, June 1896, pp. 53, 54, July 1896, pp. 68-70—reprinted in the *Complete Writings*, vol. 5, pp. 261-274) all the manuscripts dealing with this subject, which he found in the poet’s papers, but recently William L. Finkel (“Sources of Walt Whitman’s Manuscript Notes on Physique,” *American Literature*, vol. 22, pp. 308-331, Nov. 1950) has proved that they were merely notes taken while reading. This discovery, however, detracts nothing from their importance, for whether Whitman wrote them himself or merely copied them, these manuscripts reveal the eager interest he took in this subject and show that he had adopted as his own all these borrowed ideas as is proved by this passage of his American Primer: “Drinking brandy, gin, beer, is generally fatal to the perfection of the voice;—meanness of mind the same; gluttony in eating, of course the same, a thinned habit of body, or a rank habit of body—masturbation, inordinate going with women rot the voice. Yet no man can have a great vocation who has no experience with women and no woman who has no experience with men. The final fiber and charm of the voice follows the chaste drench of love.” (pp. 9-10). This last sentence suggests that he did not preach moral asceticism, far from it. He felt moral purity to be indispensable to the artist, but condemned absolute chastity.

⁴⁴Cf. “Bathing—Cleanliness—Personal Beauty,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 10, 1846, *The Gathering of the Forces*, vol. II, pp. 201-207—and also “Art of Health,” *ibid.*, pp. 199-201.

⁴⁵“Pugilism and Pugilists,” *I Sit and Look Out*, pp. 105-106 and “Brooklyn Young Men—Athletic Exercises,” *The Gathering of the Forces*, vol. 2, pp. 207-209.

⁴⁶“He took occasion to inform us . . . of his bathing daily through the midwinter . . .” *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. and sel. by Odell Shepard, Boston, 1938, p. 289.

⁴⁷Cf. *Calamus*, p. 24.

⁴⁸Cf. his letter to Hugo Fritsch of Aug. 7, 1863 (*Complete Poetry, Selected Prose and Letters*, p. 917). He was not in favour of extreme solutions in these matters; cf. the article in the *Brooklyn Times* of June 1858 (*I Sit and Look Out*, pp. 45-46) in which he made fun of vegetarians and water-drinkers. He also condemned prohibition (cf. *ibid.* pp. 47-49).

⁴⁹In an article entitled "Personal Magnetism—How it may be augmented," now in the Trent Collection of Duke University, he had underlined the following passage: "A single act of gluttony or inebriety palsies for a time the perceptions, the judgment, the play of social feeling, the moral sense, the will,—every power that is necessary to success. . . . One in this frame of body radiates no controlling influence, neither wins nor molds those about him. No matter what his constitutional capabilities, for the time he imparts nothing, but receives—commiseration or contempt."

⁵⁰*Complete Writings*, vol. 6, pp. 211-212.

⁵¹Cf. n. 49 above.

⁵²"Poem of the Road," *Leaves of Grass*, 1856, p. 233 or "Song of the Open Road," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 129, §11, 1.4-5.

⁵³"Preface to 1876 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 517 n.

⁵⁴"Preface to 1855 Edition," *ibid.*, p. 502.

⁵⁵*American Primer*, p. 2.

⁵⁶Unfortunately he was not always able to put into practice this other rule which he had formulated in 1855: "The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work." (*Inclusive Edition*, p. 494). He enjoyed nevertheless long periods of inactivity which precisely coincided with times of intense poetic productivity: from 1859 to 1865 and then from 1873 to his death.

⁵⁷He used the word himself in 1891 in "Good-bye my fancy," but he gave it the meaning of inspiration.

⁵⁸From a review of *Leaves of Grass* which Whitman wrote himself for the *American Phrenological Journal*; cf. *Leaves of Grass*, 1856, pp. 372-373.

⁵⁹"Poem of Many in One," *ibid.*, p. 190 or "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 660, 1.5 of var. of §10, after 1.17.

⁶⁰"A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 524. Cf. also "Says" (1860), §5, 1.6-7, *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁶¹Cf. for instance: "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood" (1872), *ibid.*, pp. 379-384. "Columbia" is also to be found in "Song of the Exposition" §4, 1.2 and "O Star of France," 1. 36.

⁶²"After all not to create only," (1871), or "Song of the Exposition," *ibid.*, pp. 166-174.

⁶³"Preface to 1876 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 520. He had already spoken of it in more general terms, ten years before, in an unpublished letter destined to M. D. Conway, which he wanted to send him through O'Connor. He praised in it the qualities which to his mind gave his own work its value and originality and would

justify its publication in England. Among other things he wrote this: "The idea, however, which is this man's highest contribution, and which compared even with the vastness of Biblical and Homeric poetry, still looms and towers, as, athwart his fellow-giants of the Himalayas, the dim head of Kunchainjuga rises over the rest—is the idea of Totality . . . his talisman is *Ensemble*. This is the word that epitomizes the philosophy of Walt Whitman." (Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.)

⁴⁴"Proto-Leaf," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 16 (46) or "Starting from Paumanok," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 19, §12, 1. 17-19.

⁴⁵"Chants Democratic, n°13," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 185 (2) or "Laws for Creation," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 324, 1.4 and p. 696, 1st 1. of the var.

⁴⁶"Poem of Joys," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 268 (37) or "A Song of Joys," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 149, §1, 1.13-14.

⁴⁷Last 2 lines of "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."

⁴⁸"Preface to 1855 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 501.

⁴⁹*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 51 or "Song of Myself," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 70, §45, 1.26. Cf. also "Miracles" *ibid.*, p. 326, 1. 16.

⁵⁰"Song of Myself" §8-16 and 33-38 in particular.

⁵¹"Poem of Joys," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 267 (32) or "A Song of Joys," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 153, 1.112-114.

⁵²"Leaves of Grass, n°15," *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 234 or "Night on the Prairies," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 377, 1. 11-15.

⁵³Cf. "The first dandelion" (1888), *Inclusive Edition*, p. 423; "My Canary Bird" p. 422; "Broadway" p. 430; "A Font of Type" p. 421. There is a fine instance of broadening out to the infinite of a very humble scene in "Sparkles from the Wheel" (1871), *ibid.*, p. 327, 1.12.

⁵⁴"To the Sun-Set Breeze," (1890), *Inclusive Edition*, p. 449, 1, 9-11.

⁵⁵*Notes and Fragments*, p. 79 (10). The beginning of the note: "I imagining myself in that condition mentioned you must do the work—you must think. To You . . ." shows that he put into practice himself the advice he gave to his readers.

⁵⁶Cf. in particular *Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p. 35 or "Song of Myself," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 51, §33, 1.1-7 and p. 52, 1. 81-82.

⁵⁷"Preface to 1876 Edition," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 520.

⁵⁸Extract from a notebook anterior to 1855. *Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, vol. II, p. 86. Cf. also: "Astronomy was understood—with which no nation can be degraded nor any race

of learned persons remain without grand thoughts and poems.” *Complete Writings*, vol. 6, pp. 106-107.

⁷⁰Except perhaps for Carlyle thanks to his historical sense.

⁷¹Cf. in particular “With Antecedents” (1860), *Inclusive Edition*, p. 203-205, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856), p. 135, §3, 1.1-2 and var. p. 606 and “Song of Myself” (1855) p. 50, §31, pp. 68-70, §44-45.

⁷²“Leaves of Grass, 1855, p. 24 or “Song of Myself,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 38, §16, 1.16.

⁷³“Old Chants” and “Long, long hence.”

⁷⁴“Leaves of Grass, 1855, p. 46 or “Song of Myself,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 64, §41, 1.28-29. Cf. also p. 50, §31, 1.1-7, and *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, vol. II, p. 70.

⁷⁵“Faith Poem,” *Leaves of Grass*, 1858, p. 265 or “Assurances,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 373, 1.3.

⁷⁶“Leaves of Grass, 1855, p. 20 or “Song of Myself,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 33, §13, 1.1-5. Cf. this recollection of Mrs. O’Connor: “He once went over to Georgetown, where coal barges were being unloaded at the Canal, and he told us that he watched for hours a negro at work who was naked to the waist, and the play of his muscles, as he loaded and unloaded the buckets of coal, was most fascinating; ‘No Greek statue would have been more superb’, he said.” Ellen M. Calder, “Personal Recollections of Walt Whitman”, *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 99, p. 833, June 1907.

⁷⁷“Poetry to-day in America,” *Complete Poetry and Prose*, vol. 2, pp. 301-302.

⁷⁸A quality which he called “truth” in “Great are the Myths” (1855), *Inclusive Edition*, p. 466, §2, 1.7-9. Cf. also “Sun-Down Papers, n°40” in *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, vol. I, p. 43.

⁷⁹“Preface to 1855 Edition,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 500. The passage was inserted with hardly any change in “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” in 1856. Cf. *Inclusive Edition*, p. 660, §10, after 1. 17, 1.8-11.

⁸⁰“Sparkles from the Wheel,” *ibid.*, p. 327, 1.12.

⁸¹“Democratic Vistas,” *Complete Poetry and Prose*, vol. 2, pp. 254-255 and “Poetry To-Day in America,” *ibid.*, pp. 304-305.

⁸²“Leaves of Grass, 1855, p. 27 or *Inclusive Edition*, p. 42, §22, 1.14.

⁸³“Leaves of Grass, 1855, p. 53 or *Inclusive Edition*, p. 73, §48, 1.4.

⁸⁴“Leaves of Grass, n°23,” *Leaves of Grass*, 1860, p. 241 or “Locations and Times,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 235.

⁸⁵This article entitled “Imagination and Fact” (Jan. 1852) is now in the Trent Collection of Duke University; cf. *Catalogue*, p. 73.

⁸⁶“Grand is the Seen,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 457, 1. 1, 4, 6.

⁹⁶“Poem of Many in One,” *Leaves of Grass*, 1856, pp. 188-189, or “By Blue Ontario’s Shore,” *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 291-292, §10, 1. 3, 12.

⁹⁷“Wordsworth lacks sympathy with men and women—that does not pervade him enough—by a long shot.” Written in the margin of an article entitled “Christopher under Canvas” (June 1849), now kept in the Trent Collection of Duke University.

⁹⁸“To a Common Prostitute,” *Inclusive Edition*, p. 324.

⁹⁹“Continuities,” *ibid.*, p. 432.

¹⁰⁰Cf. W. S. Kennedy, *The Fight of a Book for the World*, pp. 153-175.

¹⁰¹*Leaves of Grass*, 1856, pp. 316-321 or “Respondez,” *Inclusive Edition*, pp. 469-472 and var. p. 706.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 619, var. of §3, after 1.3 and 1. 33-38.

¹⁰³Manuscript notes now in the Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁴Except for two pieces: “A Boston Ballad” and “To the States, To identify the 16th, 17th or 18th Presidentiad.”

Whitman in Scandinavia

BY 1872 WHITMAN was known in both Denmark and Norway. Rudolf Schmidt, a Danish journalist and champion of democratic thought, published a long essay on ". . . the American Democratic Poet" in the February number of *For Idé og Virkelighed* [For Idea and Reality], and two years later Schmidt published a translation of *Democratic Vistas*, or *Demokratiske Fremblik*. The same year Professor Rasmus B. Anderson, of the University of Wisconsin, visited Björnstjerne Björnson of Norway, and found him to be a great admirer of Whitman and *Democratic Vistas*. This book also aroused the interest of Kristofer Janson, and was at least partly responsible for his going to America, where he served as a Unitarian clergyman in a Minnesota church from 1881 to 1892. He praised Whitman in his book on American cultural conditions, *Amerikanske Forhold*, published in Copenhagen in 1881.

However, another Norwegian, Knut Hamsun, had a very different opinion of Whitman. Soon after his return from America, where he had worked as a street-car conductor in Chicago, he gave a satirical speech on the American poet in Copenhagen—included in the present volume. Although Hamsun could see little in Whitman of any value, like Janson, he regarded him as the voice of nature in an uncultivated, primitive land; but the difference was that Janson thought it the voice of the future, while Hamsun regarded it as the voice of barbarism.

It was sixteen years before anyone else in Scandinavia paid any special attention to Whitman. Then in 1905 Johannes V. Jensen, who was soon to become Denmark's most prominent modern

author, treated the duality of Whitman's personality in an allegorical novel, *Hjulet* [The Wheel], and quoted some of his poems in Danish—later revised for a little volume of poems in translation by Jensen and Otto Gelsted, which they called *Walt Whitman, Digte* (1919). In 1929 Börge Houmann published a larger volume of selected poems in translation, but he failed to preserve Whitman's characteristic style. Four years later Frederik Schyberg published a vastly superior version of selected poems, and the same year a remarkable critical study called simply *Walt Whitman*, in which he attempted to trace the poet's development through all the editions of his poems. His insight into Whitman's psychology was truly remarkable, and a translation of this book into English has been well received in America.

Andrea Butenschön had written about Whitman in the Swedish magazine *Ord och Bild* [Word and Picture] as early as 1905, but Whitman did not attract much attention in Sweden before Schyberg's publications. His *Walt Whitman* stimulated Roland Fridholm to write his "Pindaros från Paumanok"—see translation in this volume. And in 1935 K. A. Svensson brought out a volume of Whitman's key poems called *Strån av Gräs* [Straws of Grass]. Finally, in 1947 Per Arneberg published an excellent Norwegian version of Whitman's most famous poem, *Sangen om Meg Selv*. This translation moved Kjell Krogvig to suggest that Norway's great epic poet, Henrik Wergeland, could show the way to an understanding of the American poet—see "To Whitman through Wergeland," in this volume. Although there is still no complete translation of *Leaves of Grass* into any of the Scandinavian languages, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden now have excellent versions of selected poems, and most of the younger writers have some acquaintance with Whitman, and a few have been deeply influenced by him.

The Primitive Poet, Walt Whitman*

By Knut Hamsun

Translated by Evie Allison Allen

IN 1885 [*sic*] a book was published in Boston which evoked a letter from Emerson, a reprint in London and an essay by Rudolf Schmidt. The book was called *Leaves of Grass* and the author, Walt Whitman. When this book appeared Whitman was thirty-six years old.

The author called the work poetry; Rudolf Schmidt also called it poetry; Emerson, on the contrary, had plainly not been able to hit on any designation for this work with its extremely weak system of thought. In reality it is not poetry at all; no more than the multiplication tables are poetry. It is composed in pure prose, without meter or rhyme. The only way in which it resembles verse is that one line may have one, two, or three words, the next twenty-eight, thirty-five, or literally up to forty-three words.

The author called himself a "cosmos"; Rudolf Schmidt called him a "cosmos." I, on the other hand, can only with difficulty find any connection with a term so extremely comprehensive, so that for my part he could equally well be a cosmos, a pigeon-hole, or anything else. I will modestly and simply call Walt Whitman a savage. He is a voice of nature in an uncultivated, primitive land.

He is somewhat of an Indian both in his language and emotions; and, accordingly, he celebrates the sea, the air, the earth, the grass, the mountains, the rivers, in brief, the natural elements. He always calls Long Island, his birthplace, by its Indian name, Paumanok; he constantly uses the Indian term *maize* instead of the English *corn*. Again and again he refers to American places—even whole states—by Indian names; in his poetry there are entire stanzas of American aboriginal names. He feels so moved by the primitive music of these places that he crams long series of them into passages where they have no connection whatever with the text; often he mentions a score of state names in a row without saying a word about the states. It is a pretentious game with savage words. One of his poems goes thus:

From Paumanok starting I fly like a bird,
Around and around to soar to sing the idea of all,

*Title supplied by the editor. This essay was an expansion of an address Hamsun gave in the Copenhagen Student Union during the winter of 1889, and published in *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv*, Copenhagen, 1889, pp. 63-85.

To the north betaking myself to sing there arctic songs,
 To Kanada till I absorb Kanada in myself, to Michigan then,
 To Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, to sing their songs,
 (they are inimitable;) Then to Ohio and Indiana to sing theirs, to Missouri and Kansas
 and Arkansas to sing theirs,
 To Tennessee and Kentucky, to the Carolinas and Georgia to
 sing theirs,
 To Texas and so along up toward California, to roam accepted
 everywhere;
 To sing first (to the tap of the war-drum if need be).
 The idea of all, of the Western world one and inseparable,
 And then the song of each member of these States.

The innate primitiveness of his nature, the barbaric Indian feeling of kinship with the elements about him, is expressed everywhere in his book and often bursts into brilliant flame. When the wind whispers or an animal howls, it seems to him that he hears a group of Indian names. He says:

. . . sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,

Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chatta-hoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco,
 Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,
 Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the water and the land with names.

It requires at least twice as much inspiration to read such verse as it does to write it.

His style is not English: his style belongs to no culture. His style is the difficult Indian picture-writing, without the pictures, influenced by the ponderous and hard to comprehend Old Testament. His language rolls heavily and confusedly over the pages of his book, roaring along with columns of words, regiments of words, each one of which makes the poem more unintelligible than the other. He has poems which are completely grandiose in their unreadableness. In one of them, an unusually profound poem in three lines, over half of which is in parentheses, he "sings" as follows:

Still though the one I sing
 (One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to Nationality,
 I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection!
 O quenchless, indispensable fire!)

That could just as well be a birthday greeting as an Easter hymn. It could as easily be a poem as a rule of three. However, we refuse to believe that in this primitive poem the author means to sing that he is a patriot and at the same time a complete rebel.

O'Connor said that one must have seen Whitman to understand his book; Bucke, Conway, and Rhys also say that one must have seen him first to be able to understand his book. But it seems to me that the impression of dream-like barbarianism one gets from reading *Leaves of Grass* would be strengthened rather than weakened by seeing the author. He is certainly the last specimen of a modern man who was born a savage.

Thirty or forty years ago people in New York, Boston, New Orleans, and later Washington met on the streets a man of unusually powerful physique, a large, serene man of somewhat crude appearance, always dressed in careless fashion, reminding one of a mechanic, or a sailor, or some other workman. He almost always went without a coat, often without a hat; in warm weather he kept to the sunny side of the street and let the sun beat down on his great head. His features were large but handsome; he had at once a proud and benign expression; his blue eyes were gentle. He frequently spoke to passersby whether he knew them or not; sometimes tapped strange men on the shoulder. He never laughed; usually he wore gray clothes, which were always clean but often lacked buttons; he wore colored shirts and a white paper collar about his neck. Such was the appearance of Whitman at that time.

Now he is a sick old man of seventy years. I have seen a picture of him taken a few years ago. As usual he is in shirt-sleeves; as usual he inappropriately has on his hat. His face is large and handsome, his thick hair and beard, which he never cut, cascade over his shoulders and chest. On the forefinger of his extended hand he holds an artificial butterfly with wings outstretched; he sits and observes it.

These portraits of Whitman do not civilize his book; as a literary production it is a poetic desecration. Some people have wanted to regard him as the American folk-poet. This can only be considered ironical. He lacks all the unity and simplicity of a folk-poet. His primitive emotions ante-date those of the people. And his language is not calm but raucous power; it mounts now and then to high orchestral outbursts, frightful shouts of victory which remind the stunned reader of Indian war dances. And everywhere, on closer inspection, we find it is only a wild carnival of words. The author

made a great effort to express something in his poems but he could not get it said for the words. He has poems which consist of almost nothing except names, poems of which single lines could be used as titles for poems:

Americanos! conquerors! etc.

* * * *

Chants of the prairies,

Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican sea,

Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota,

Chants going forth from the centre of Kansas, and thence equidistant,

Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all.

End! In the next poem [section of the poem] he talks of something entirely different; in the next poem [*sic*] he records how he "in old times" sat "studying at the feet of the great masters," but now the old masters "might return and study me." When we consider that he puts first among the old masters, Christ, Socrates, and Plato, it is understandable that a civilized reader of the poem feels a little incredulous.

It was obviously the long series and groups of repeated names and terms in Whitman's poetry which aroused the interest of Emerson and the English authors. These repetitions, catalogic columns, are absolutely the most unique and original quality of his poetry. They are literary phenomena. They are without parallel. His whole book is stuffed full of these lists. In a poem of twelve sections, "Song of the Broad-Axe," there is scarcely a stanza that does not have a catalogue. One section reads thus:

Welcome are all earth's lands, each for its kind,

Welcome are lands of pine and oak,

Welcome are lands of the lemon and fig,

Welcome are lands of gold,

Welcome are lands of wheat and maize, welcome those of the grape,

Welcome are lands of sugar and rice,

Welcome are the cotton-lands, welcome those of the white potato and sweet potato,

Welcome are mountains, flats, sands, forests, prairies,

Welcome are the rich borders of rivers, table-lands, openings,

Welcome the measureless grazing lands, welcome the teeming

soil of orchards, flax, honey, hemp;
Welcome just as much the other more hard-faced lands,
Lands rich as lands of gold or wheat and fruit lands,
Lands of mines, lands of the manly and rugged ores,
Lands of coal, copper, lead, tin, zinc,
Lands of iron—lands of the make of the axe.

The ninth section of the same catalogic poem begins with one of the author's usual incomprehensible parentheses and continues:
(America! I do not vaunt my love for you,
I have what I have.)

The axe leaps!
The solid forest gives fluid utterances,
They tumble forth, they rise and form,
Hut, tent, landing, survey,
Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,
Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, jamb, lath, panel, gable,
Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition-house, library,
Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, turret, porch,
Hoe, rake, pitchfork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw, jack-plane, mallet,
wedge, rounce,
Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,
Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not,
Capitols of States, and capitol of the nation of States,
Long stately rows in avenues, hospitals for orphans or for the
poor or sick,
Manhattan steamboats and clippers taking the measure of all
the seas.

It is heresy to say it, perhaps almost blasphemy, but I confess that in the darkness of night when I could not sleep and yielded to the impulse to think of writing poetry, it has happened that I had to grit my teeth in order not to say frankly: I could write poetry like that too!

What did Whitman want? Did he want to abolish the slave trade in Africa or forbid the use of walking sticks? Did he want to build a new school house in Wyoming or introduce woolen hunting jackets? No one knows! In the art of talking much and saying absolutely nothing I have never met his equal. His words are warm; they glow; there is passion, power, enthusiasm in his verse. One hears this desperate word music and feels his breast heave. But one does not know why he is enthusiastic. Thunder rolls through the

whole book and lightning flashes; but the spark never comes. One reads page after page and is not able to find the meaning of anything. One is confused or intoxicated by these enthusiastic word-tables; one is paralyzed; crushed to earth in stupid hopelessness; their eternal unending monotony finally affects the reader's understanding. By the time one has read the last poem one cannot count to four. One really stands before an author who strains an ordinary person's mentality. The poet merely went along the road ("Song of the Open Road") and felt himself overcome by ecstasy—"the road shall be more to me than my poems"—and afterwards as he wandered on this often-mentioned road, he found "divine things well envelop'd." He was like the man of the desert who waked one morning at an oasis and fell into a reverie as he looked at the grass. "I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell," he exclaims constantly in regard to this road which he mentions over and over again. But he never expresses the divine things, so does not make the reader any wiser.

Even with the author's own picture vividly before the eyes, *Leaves of Grass* is still like "unspeakable" darkness for the poor reader, like a book without pictures. It is perhaps highly doubtful whether one could understand the poems better if one actually knew the poet. At most he personally might explain what he meant by his various catalogues; however, they were not expressed in understandable words but remain in writing which supposedly contains "songs." Moreover, according to his own and his biographer's account, Whitman meant to celebrate Democracy in his book. He is "the poet of Democracy." Furthermore, he is also, according to Rhys, the "Poet of the Universe"; so one must presume the singer is a highly gifted man. One does not fail to observe that at times he must have had difficult problems with his catalogues.

How is he "the poet of Democracy"? In "I Hear America Singing," which is a program-poem, he is the poet of democracy in the following manner and fashion:

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe
and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves
off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-
hand singing on the steamboat deck,

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at the noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the part of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

In this poem he forgot, if meter means anything, to count at all; and if verse is all-inclusive, he forgot to hear saddlers or street-car conductors, or general managers sing! If a poet of democracy here at home wrote such a poem—whether it was about a shoemaker who sings as he sits on his bench or a hatter who sings as he stands—and brought it to a newspaper or the Danish editor of an almanac, I venture to believe that they would want to feel the singer's pulse and maybe offer him a glass of water. If he refused to admit that he was ill, one would at least feel that he jested very crudely.

Walt Whitman is a gifted American lyricist; as such he is a rare phenomenon. He has read little or nothing and had less experience with life. Little has happened to him. He was born in 1819; at twenty he was cheated of his betrothed; during the war over slavery he was a nurse; in 1868 he was discharged from his position in the Department of the Interior but was later taken back again; in 1873 his mother died and at the same time, according to his own statement, something in him died. This is his life story in brief. Besides *Leaves of Grass* he has written and published a few other things, among them *Specimen Days and Collect* and *Democratic Vistas*, which, however, have in no way strengthened his position in literary history. When Whitman's name is mentioned it is in connection with *Leaves of Grass*; his essays are not read and are in part unreadable.

If he had been born in a land of culture and been intelligently educated, he might possibly have been a little Wagner; his spirit is sensitive and his disposition musical; but born in America, that remote corner of the world where he could always shout Hurrah and where the only recognized talent is salesmanship, he had to be a changeling, a mixture of primitive being and modern man. "In our country," says the American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, "there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and

gloomy wrong." For an original primitive like Whitman his innate inclination is to do more or less primitive reading; thus for him reading the Bible is the highest poetic enjoyment; in this way he undoubtedly developed his savage tendencies more than he repressed them. Everywhere in his poetry the language and the imagery of the Bible reappear; in places the similarity to the Bible is so striking that we must almost marvel at the completeness with which he has been able to assimilate such a peculiar form. In "Song of the Answerer" he says:

A young man comes to me bearing a message from his brother,
How shall the young man know the whether and when of his
brother?

Tell him to send me the signs.

And I stand before the young man face to face, and take his right
hand in my left hand and his left hand in my right hand,
And I answer for his brother and for men, and I answer for him
that answers for all, and send these signs . . .

Doesn't that read like an excerpt from one of the Old Testament writers? Whitman's constant study of biblical poetry has certainly increased his literary boldness, so that he frankly mentions things that are tabu. He is modern in so far as he always writes brutally with the intense literalness felt and thought by uncultivated minds. But it is scarcely because of any conscious feeling of artistic courage that he has poeticised Reality; it is much more the result of the naivete of a child of nature. The section of erotic poems in *Leaves of Grass* for which he has been censured and about which supercilious Bostonians shouted to heaven, in reality contains nothing more than can be said with impunity in any literature; it is another matter entirely that the audaciousness is rather crudely, illiterately spoken, as it certainly is. With somewhat less naivete and a little less biblical influence, one could say twice as much as he says and give it double the literary value merely by a superficial use of literary dexterity, such as shifting a word here, revising another there, deleting a vulgarity and replacing it with an acceptable term. The language in Whitman's poetry is by far the boldest and warmest in all literature, but in the main it is naive and lacking in taste.

Walt Whitman's naivete is so incongruously great that it can actually be captivating, and now and then the reader can put up with it. It is this strange naivete which has won him a few disciples

among *men of letters*. His catalogues, those impossible reiterations of persons, states, household furniture, tools, articles of dress are certainly the most naive poetry with which a literature has yet been augmented, and had it not been sung from a naive heart, it would certainly never have been read, because it shows not a vestige of talent. When Whitman celebrates something he says so in the first line, then mentions another thing in the second line and a third in the next line, without celebrating any of them except by mentioning them. He knows no more of things than the names, but he knows many names—hence all the enthusiastic name-calling. His disposition is too impatient, his thought too uneducated to grasp the single idea long enough to celebrate it; he pictures life on parade, not the fine variety of individual things but all the noisy multiplicity of things; he always sees masses. One can open the book anywhere and search any page only to find everywhere that he says he will celebrate this or that thing, which he ultimately only mentions. In this connection his little three-line poem called "Farm Picture" is interesting. Here, according to the nature of the theme, he needed to describe, to picture, and he did it thus:

Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,
And haze and vista, and far horizon fading away.

The end! That is his farm picture. Barn, country, meadow, cattle, horses, haze, vista, horizon. That the door is wide and the barn admirably peaceful, that the country is sunny at the same time that it is hazy, and hazy at the same time there is a vista—and finally the horizon fading away—it is a "description" which a reader can remember a year and a day! Whitman's incomprehensible naivete seduced him into putting this poetry into print; his naivete led him further to believe that he had produced a new and sorely needed type of poetry. In many of his poems he comes back to that. He exclaims in one place:

Shut not your doors to me proud libraries,
For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet
needed most, I bring.

There is no doubt in his mind as to his special mission as an author.

This good man's naivete is so fresh and amiable, so fundamentally the nature of primitive man that it never gives the impression of conceit. Even in places where it is most blatantly expressed and least motivated, one does not have the feeling of standing before a vain person. He is a good fellow, this man; one feels as

if one were arm in arm with him as the poet sings his lists of household furniture. In "By Blue Ontario Shore" [sic] he undertakes to "chant a poem that comes from the soul of America," which likewise would be "a carol of victory," also a song "of the throes of Democracy." After having struggled through fourteen heavy strophes with that complex task, after having for the ninety-ninth time ransacked "Missouri, Nebraska and Kansas" as well as "Chicago, Kanada and Arkansas," he suddenly pulls up and stops short. He has finally come to a conclusion; he dips his pen and writes:

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
It is not the earth, it is not America who is so great,
It is I who am great or to be great . . .

At last he says that America is himself:

America isolated yet embodying all, what is it finally except myself?
These States, what are they except myself?

And yet there is no impression of arrogant conceit; it is only naivete, a wild, boisterous naivete.

Among the poems which Whitman has collected under the title of "Calamus" are to be found the best in the book. Here he sings of the love for men which beats strongly in his good warm breast and occasionally finds an echo in others. Through "love of Comrades" he will rejuvenate the corrupt American democracy; by it he will "make the continent indissoluble"; "make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks"; make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon"; "plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers." There occur isolated coherent passages in these poems; they stand out therefore as strange exceptions in his book. His primitively unrestrained emotional nature is here expressed in somewhat civilized English, which is thus intelligible even to his compatriots. In a poem entitled "Sometimes With One I Love" he is so extraordinarily clear that, in surprise, one supposes these two or three lines must have been written by his mother or some other intelligent person:

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I effuse
unreturn'd love,
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love, the pay is certain
one way or another,
(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not return'd,
Yet out of that I have written these songs.)

Here—if we overlook the author's break in rhythm in the first and second lines—we can find a comprehensible thought expressed in intelligible language—actually in language which, remembering that it is lyrical, is used legitimately; but he cannot restrain himself long; a few lines further he is again the incomprehensible savage. In one poem he indicates in all seriousness that he is personally present with each individual reader of his book; "Be not too certain but I am now with you," he warns. In the next poem ["That Shadow My Likeness"] he lapsed into despair concerning Walt Whitman's shadow:

That shadow . . .

How often I find myself standing and looking at it where it flits,
How often I question and doubt whether it is really me; . . .

It seems to me that this doubt is not wholly unjustified; always one is endowed with a shadow which can fly while one stands and watches.

Whitman is a very genial person, a man of native capacity, born too late. In "Song of the Open Road" he plainly reveals what a benevolent disposition he has, mingled with all the naivete of his ideas. If his verse were written in a little more regular style, much of it would be poetry; on the other hand, it is novel for an author to continually hinder the understanding of his poetry because of the incomprehensible word-mechanism he uses. He cannot say a thing once emphatically; he is incapable of making a point. He says a thing five times and always in the same grand but meaningless way. He does not control his material, he lets it control him; that is evident in his colossal form which accumulates and overwhelms him. In all this song of the highway his heart is warmer than his brain is cool; therefore he can neither describe nor celebrate; he can only exult—exult in wild outbursts over everything and nothing. One feels a heart beating violently in the pages of his book, but one seeks in vain for a probable reason why that heart has been so strongly moved. One cannot conceive that a mere road could make a heart palpitate so. Whitman is intoxicated by it; his bosom heaving with emotion, he says frankly: "I think I could stop here myself and do miracles."

How his great joyous heart leads him astray:

I think whatever I shall meet on the road I shall like, and who-ever beholds me shall like me.

He says in his strange inaccurate language:

Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,

Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me.

He is impressive, very impressive. At times his great goodness astonishes even himself, so that the naive and simple soul goes on to sing:

I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

He is rather an exuberant man than a talented poet. Walt Whitman certainly cannot write. But he can feel. He lives an emotional life. If he had not received that letter from Emerson his book would have failed, as it deserved to fail.

Walt Whitman*

By Johannes V. Jensen

Translated by Evie Allison Allen

HAD WALT WHITMAN LIVED to be a hundred years old—and it would have been like him, since he had something of the longevity of Drakenberg, Ashaserus, and all other vagabonds—he would have encountered an enormous growth in his reputation such as he could scarcely have dreamed of but which was inherent in his poetry. Briefly, the universal was Whitman's passion and an age which seeks the universal seeks Walt Whitman. At the moment [1919] he is assiduously imitated in France, a phenomenon that is not easily explained; the war has drawn France and America closer together, and since two incommensurable entities must take something from each other, France has taken Whitman. In Germany he is imitated, and the explanation is obvious; he has been taken over as another novelty, not from America but from France, just as Naturalism, Impressionism, and more recently the Negroid style have been in turn. For this latest brilliant cultural borrowing the Germans have invented the term Expressionism, which gives a very good idea of the lightning speed with which people express themselves when they are fortunate enough to get both the tempo and form from others. Whitman was introduced into this country [Denmark] as early as the Rudolf Schmidt-Rosenberg period [1870's] without at-

*Introduction (without title) to Johannes V. Jensen and Otto Gelsted's *Walt Whitman: Digte* [Poetry], Köbenhavn, Kristiana: Nyt Dansk Forlag, 1919. Printed by kind permission of Mrs. Jensen.

tracting any attention except as a curiosity. In due course I translated some of his poems which appear in this collection, supplemented by Otto Gelsted's translations. But I must be permitted to comment that these poems originally appeared in a novel (*Hjulet* [The Wheel], 1905) with an American motif and consequently a peculiarly American atmosphere; thus they have a relative value. If it is of any interest, I might say in this connection that the poems I have written in free verse have not been in any way inspired by Whitman. In fact, I used Goethe's "Wanderer's Storm Song" and Heine's "North Sea" as models. I have studied Whitman but one should look for the influence in my prose. As early as 1900 I wrote about machines in the spirit of Whitman, but did not use his verse form. It occurred to me even then that what Whitman stood for and what he taught is this: Express your own age in the language of your own time. It should be obvious that to follow Whitman one does not begin by imitating his poetry, since both the period and the people are different from nineteenth century America. Nevertheless, most people do not interpret him in this way; they Whitmanize in many tongues, happy to escape from the bondage of rhyme until it has become a sort of horse-measure, probably similar to that in which the Houyhnhnms once whinnied. Many who do not have anything to say in prose and lack the capacity for a purely lyrical expression try to find a solution in an extravagant strophe form which at least typographically suggests Whitman.

Yet Whitman should not be held responsible for the sins of his disciples; what innovator has not had a troop of followers who copied all the obvious literary eccentricities, the trademarks, and yet remained innocently unaware of their master's philosophy of life.

If we compare Whitman's work with that of the other American and English writers of his day, his achievement is tremendous, unique, an outburst of originality such as not every century sees; a very special state of mind turned this ordinary artisan into a vital artistic force, impervious to the prevailing contemporary literary forms. The whole basis of his esthetic is an atavistic memory and a lusty, phenomenal joy. He began by turning his back on all literature and literary circles and started alone in the street. He did not reform or re-make current poetic style; he threw it aside and simply put Whitman in its place. His rhythm is made up of things themselves, of sounds; to him a series of names is poetry—and it is poetry, an invocation, an ecstatic proclamation of the things he loves.

If one should try to find the origin of the Whitmanesque style I believe he could point to two sources, the American press and the Bible. The American newspaper style, the exclamatory, telegraphic style, the banked headlines, the explosive conglomeration of details all remind us of Whitman; the content of any American newspaper suggests Whitman's famous catalogues and grows in the imagination in the same way. He began his career as a printer, and in the printing office he could have received a permanent visual impression of the identity of language and objects which he afterwards developed into his strophe. The free verse of Goethe and Heine undoubtedly came down from Pindar and the Greek chorus, but the actual form is found in the Eskimo incantation. The primal source is the ecstatically delivered prose of the shaman. Whitman's free rhythms are like the Greeks, but otherwise he is entirely non-Greek, non-academic. The complete lack of classical form alone makes Whitman a modern. He is solemn and direct as the prophets, his style recalls the strophe divisions of the biblical prose, with the ponderous movement resulting from the translation of the original Hebraic poetry into the prose of another language. In a certain sense the Bible is more modern than the Greeks, it is more elemental, more savage, has more of our own Darwinian age; each person determines its meaning for himself.

The form that Whitman evolved was his own, a piece of nature. With all the power of his lungs he proclaimed America. When one considers the poetic literature of the period, with its English primness and decorum, in which roses conversed with lilies, and poesy fed on poesy, Whitman's effect is that of an avalanche of matter, things, substance. *Leaves of Grass* is an immense collection of material, an experimental register of America's realities. It does not go beyond that; it is a colossal inventory, but to accomplish this enumeration is an intellectual achievement. It is easy to see now that America of that period should have been more open-minded, but the majority failed to see what *Leaves of Grass* stood for. It was a period of great immigration, a folk-blending took place on a scale hitherto unheard of. Travel was in its infancy, and though the actual, athletic America had arisen so recently, yet it had not won a very desirable name for itself. The word "American" had come to mean gigantic, fabulous, and could be characterized in no other way than by the robust, money-mad practical joker personified in the concept of a Yankee. Only recently had people begun to take America seriously, but they thought her crack-brained. In France

the superficial wits still considered American a term of opprobrium. Heine called America a land of boors. In the '90's Henrik Cavling had the same amused but respectful attitude toward America which one might assume toward a vast carnival. Hamsun attacked America as the "dollar-land" it is, and he was especially blind to Whitman's importance. Yet it was from America that Hamsun brought back the linguistic innovations which afterwards turned back the French inundation. Understanding of America was slow in coming; Americans did not understand themselves but wavered between Cooper's colorful Indian country and Mark Twain's buffoonery. In reality Whitman was the only one with a clear vision. He saw the real America, and now we are beginning to see it with his eyes. He had the insight to see with his own eyes, and now the two worlds, the old and the new, are beginning to agree on what he saw.

Whitman's significance should be sought in the glory he throws over America; he is a guidepost to the West. His personality does not repay the curious for a closer look. Neither his own autobiographical contributions nor the accounts of others are of special interest. The pathological nature which he could not conceal restricted his private life to a sphere which is familiar ground to those who suffer from the same malady and is a closed world to others; but the nature of his impulses need not diminish the artistic value of his work. It often happens in nature that disease leads to momentous development in other fields. It is a mistake to be interested only in the cause of illness. An ethical evaluation should be avoided. America has not yet offered to gather around Whitman as a national intellectual leader; presumably that is not to be considered. He towers among the great eccentrics, but not among the harmonious great such as Björnson.

In one respect the abnormal in Whitman's nature is of purely aesthetic interest to the student of pathology. For example, Whitman's emotions, as expressed in many passages of his writings, seem to me to reveal the dark secrets of feminine psychology. Women cannot and will not go into it, and those who have done so have not been real women. Whitman's erotic confession sounds as if it came from an instrument tuned in the womanly key; like a girl's, his soul is just beneath the skin, everywhere and nowhere. He is vasomotorly prompted whether in the bath or before the fire; like a woman he feels the tension in all sorts of places. Beauty is present, as always when we meet femininity, so long as you forget while you read that it was a big, bearded, lubberly fellow who wrote it.

When we look at Whitman from this point of view, we realize he should be comprehended in many different ways if we are to benefit from his work, and that one view does not exclude the other.

At the moment his influence is scarcely fruitful. I see that some rejoice in his doctrine that the Libido shall rule unchecked, without regard to sex, a world of nothing but "Camerados," which would certainly be a snug monkey-cage. His irresponsible vagrancy, vagabondage, the baring of his soul, which made him akin to the Russians and Verlaine, seems to attract many, a symptom of a decadent period.

Yet as a prophet he is of outstanding significance. If instead of making use of his idiom we would use his method, the world would be the gainer. He is more than a perplexing individual about whom critics and biographers give us information, more than a soothsayer or monotonous shaman; rather he is a Prince of Words and a gateway to America. America is a huge book and *Leaves of Grass* is the key to it.

Pindar from Paumanok*

By Roland Fridholm

Translated by Evie Allison Allen

WE USUALLY LIKE TO THINK of a mystic as soft-spoken. People do not ordinarily blab their most intimate experiences, and yet a mystic experience motivated probably the most raucous of the world's poetic masterpieces, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

A mystical experience is intangible and ineffable. To try to express it is to search for an unfamiliar melody submerged in the hum of existence, but which in an hour of awareness makes itself heard, sometimes like a vibration, piercing or exciting, in the depths of the murmur of life, sometimes like a far-away flute in a world beyond life and death, sometimes like a crystal clear note from somewhere within us, rising above the clatter and blending with the roar of the world to become a symphony transcending understanding—such is Whitman's cosmic experience of the unity of all creation. The poet, when he is most a poet, strives to express the music he ecstatically feels to be played by unseen fingers on invisible strings. But he has only words to express the inexpressible,

*"Pindaros från Paumanok," in *Ord och Bild*, XLIII, 437-433 (1934). Published by permission of *Ord och Bild*.

to give being to the non-existent. *La poésie pure* is like a dream of pouring moonlight into a bottle.

The mystic experience demands expression but the mystic can not make it come alive to someone else. When he is most deeply moved, he becomes a prophet. "Speech is the twin of my vision," says Whitman. He turns confidentially to his hearers: Thou, only thou art my intimate friend. It is to thee I speak. He despises no trick which will convey his emotion to his audience. He is like one of those American revivalists who win souls less by their antics in the pulpit than by their persuasive speech. The endless list of images and words in Whitman's early poems [those of the 1855 and '56 editions]—"the litanies" or "catalogues," as they are called—can sometimes be as fascinating as a juggler tossing a dozen porcelain plates or a magician spreading a pack of cards in an arc in the air without dropping a single card. The associations flow unbridled and shifting as in a dream, and also with the underlying continuity of a dream, until the poet almost awakens, half-voluntarily checks himself and plucks out of his dream-imagery something enumerated at random, which he now makes carry the burden of his message. This is surrealism long before the surrealistic movement. But it is also reminiscent of the revivalist's inspiration. Whitman was of old Quaker stock and had often been in the typical Quaker meeting in which all sat silent until the "inner light" was kindled in someone and gave him the compulsion and power to speak.

"Speech is the twin of my vision." In Whitman oratory had a jealous admirer. Words as words, but particularly ideas conveyed by the human voice, had for him an esoteric and sensuous value. He wanted to give to his poetry the vitality of the spoken word. Therefore he deliberately made use of the uncouth speech of the lower classes, which was still frowned upon by the genteel society of the older poets. His farewell "so long!", for example, was a slang expression heard in sailors' dives, but through Whitman's use it found admission into the American language.

Whitman's freedom in rhyme and meter rested on his attitudes toward speech. He was the father of free verse, although he had various forerunners. He could not confine the overwhelming wealth of his inspiration to the established forms. For him these words of the Grecian Cleanthes meant nothing: "Just as the breath makes a louder note in the trumpet after traveling through the narrow tubes and escaping at the wide opening, so does the restriction of verse magnify the intensity of language in a poem." Many of Whit-

man's disciples, unfortunately, demonstrated the validity of this old theory by attempting to use his form, or rather his formlessness, without the power of his inspiration.

Whitman is a prophet, and the form of his message is almost liturgic prose. It is both controlled and uncontrolled. From the beginning it had a rhythm different from prose, and he strove consciously and successfully to strengthen it. The effort of the master was what the pupils most often failed to understand, but in such effort lay the sure way to a more expressive verse art.

In the last analysis it is the musical quality of Whitman's poetry, the rhythmical flow, the orchestral swell, which determines its suggestive power. To the breakers on the coast of his native Long Island, or Paumanok, as he preferred to call it after the Indian fashion, he recited his dithyrambs. The sea was not only for him the supreme symbol of life, love, and death, but it is also the sea which undulates and surges and swells in his rhythms.

During the eighteenth century, when people in dissatisfaction with the tame poetry of their own time often spoke of the "Pindaric" poets, Whitman would surely have been denied, just as he is still denied today by many who dream of a poetry with a bolder flight than that of the contemporary but are unreceptive to his suggestions. Yet even those who remain unresponsive to his message, whether or not they are willing to yield to him, cannot avoid being overcome by his mighty surge of words, just as one can be gripped by a passionate sermon in a language he does not understand. Whitman is no longer known as a prophet but as the poet, *the poet-Pindar of Paumanok*.

Whitman's mystic experience was an experience of oneness, unity, identity. Thus also he became above all else a prophet of "identity." That is the inner harmony, the soul's concord with the body and the ego, the union of the ego with another ego in love, and finally the ego's cosmic expansion to encompass everything and merge with all creation.

This vision of unity is not a distant view from a pinnacle of thought where all sorrow, shame, and poverty appear as cloud shadows gliding over the home of mankind only to be dissipated by the all-pervading light, necessary to further emphasize its power. No one reaches the pinnacle who thinks that in the rarefied atmosphere he can lighten his knapsack by discarding all human feelings. Whitman's universal sight is only a modification of his universal emotion. And this is no *amor intellectualis*. A purely in-

tellectual identity with all creation is an impossibility. Whitman's universal emotion is rather an *amor sexualis*—an eternal bridal night with existence.

But no bridal night is eternal. In the gray dawn a voice whispers that a peace which results from accepting a philosophy of life to which in the future one will not be able to respond is a fragile peace. Existence itself is an eternal state of unrest, ceaselessly moving onward. Ixion's wheel never stops and we all share his fate. The peace which the world at any given moment can give is a fatuous happiness. Only in an identification with existence can we find true happiness. And we cannot remain on the side-lines; we must actively participate. It is as prisoners among other prisoners on Ixion's carousel and not as spectators that we come to know identity. Fortunate—truly god-like—is he who like Whitman finds repeated ecstasy in the gyrations. Such vital emotion surpasses even the Nietzschean halcyonic call to life. It is a purely erotic *amor fati*. It is complete accord with existence—and a little more.

Most people are satisfied with their grotesque condition. Many who yearn for release shout to the engineer in order to ingratiate themselves with him. But there are others who recognize no engineer, or any reason or meaning in life. Perhaps they regard all talk about the poor engineer or about eternal purpose as only the product of human vanity, as a failure to recognize the incongruity of the situation. They see no purpose in suffering, much less its necessity. They even look upon it as a duty to consider pain as meaningless. Yet they reckon with it. They find consolation in the assumption that it has no meaning. They do not strive for any identity with existence itself, but with that existence which they imagine. This is their philosophy of life, a philosophy of defiance, which seeks less for Truth than material adjustment.

This creed is not a blind worship of life. It also gives death his due. Death is a tremendous and fascinating mystery. As the most sacred of all mysteries it should be placed in the service of life. Life would be poorer without something sacred. It is only in America that it is proper to lay violent hands on the dead to make them, even as corpses, "keep smiling." Whitman's worship of life, which certainly has not a little in common with the attitude of the typical American, does not exclude the thought of death. Based on a pantheistic conviction, the worship of life can glide into a yearning for death. As the snow flake falls into the ocean and there becomes nothing and everything, so in death man achieves the final union, the most complete identity with existence, with God.

Whitman's "Passage to India" concludes with the meeting with God when the younger brother melts into the arms of the older. And the poet frequently rejoices in the idea of what splendid fertilizer his body will make for the grass. It is an innocent rapture, but for those who do not have his pantheistic creed, this rapture is a way of evading the depressing fact of death. It is a false identity with existence, not one to live by. Whitman's pantheism has nothing to make life worth while. Only the strength of experience, a glow of conviction which can kindle in people some new emotion, a warmer, stronger, richer, more vital feeling, which can force them to listen to the ecstatic talk of divinity in everything, that all is God—the golden cloud, the hawthorne copse, and the butterfly, as well as poisonous gases and cancerous tumors. Even then they may be tempted to reply: Well, since God is the same as everything else—poisonous gases, cancerous tumors, and bed-bugs—why not say so?

"There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done." It is now the poet who will take over the work of the priests. He will arouse souls to experience the new emotion of life which he himself has absorbed in a moment of ecstasy. His real task is to arouse. Then let the awakened person choose his own way.

But his pupil must be a wanderer. No romantic vagabond ever made wandering so charming as Whitman. He recognized himself as a traveler through the ages. And in "Song of the Open Road" he wanted to teach mankind "to know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls." He lived in a time when "the covered wagon" rolled westward over the endless prairies while herds of buffalo fled with thundering hooves and redskins lurked in the buffalo grass. It was an age of new horizons. In his old age Whitman himself made a long journey through the teeming West. The expansion of his own soul became one with his country. In "Pioneers, O Pioneers" the pioneers symbolize the progress of humanity, traveling always toward an ever-changing goal.

Whitman is the poet of America. Through his poetry he hoped to aid the formation of a great and united nation. Few believed in the country as he did. But for him America was primarily a symbol, a symbol of the new humanity he dreamed of. As the years passed, however, the America he knew became to him a soulless Colossus, honeycombed with hypocrisy and corruption. He began *Democratic Vistas* with the intention of replying to Carlyle's attack on American democracy, but he finally admitted, "I doubt if he ever thought or said half as bad words about us as we deserve."

The native critics of America of today [1934] have therefore been anticipated by Whitman, and yet he wanted to believe in America. He thought that the blending of races would create a new race which would give reality to his dream of "democracy." Whitman's democracy was not merely a political democracy. Like the Quakers he is on intimate terms with every one and wears his hat wherever he chooses: "I wear my hat as I please," as he put it later. But just as the Quakers' insolent meekness was an expression of the democratic ideal which was scarcely of this world, so Whitman's "democracy" was an expression of his cosmic feeling of unity with all. He is a friend and brother to wretched people everywhere. Like Dostoyevski he takes criminals and prostitutes to his bosom. He sees the divinity even in them. But it shines most brilliantly in the simple man from the common people. There it becomes a halo in the manner of old Russia. Whitman's faith in his people was of the same kind as the Russian faith in the task of the Russian folk soul to emancipate the world. The simple people and the simple grass—it was their songs he wanted to sing. In "Song of the Broad-Axe" he prophesied a race from "the divine average," which would dwell in the great city. It is not the city which has the oldest civilization but,

Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands,
Where the city of the cleanliness of sex stands,
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the great city stands.

Whitman dreamed of a purely animalistic sexuality, free from all feeling of sin and guilt. From his point of view all feeling of guilt would necessarily be abominable. He recognized his kinship to the animals; they do not lie awake at night weeping for their sins or nauseate him by prating of their duty to God. This is probably his most notorious pronouncement.

The "Children of Adam" poems, in which he most frankly proclaims this guiltless, lighthearted sensuality, ran afoul of Comstockery just as later in Sweden Fröding's *Morgendröm* [Morning dream] did. A gentleman keeps to himself the most intimate details of his love life. Both of these poets, however, who were of finer clay than most, could dream of a frank and naked sensuality because they had never experienced complete love. They knew nothing of any question of guilt or innocence. A frustrated instinct lies behind the dreams of Adam's naked child in the sunny land of the Aryans.

A dream of frank, guiltless sensuality glides easily from dreams of nakedness into dreams of the race. Fröding's naked lover was of

Aryan blood. The pure sensuality among Adam's strong, fresh, naked sons and daughters which Whitman proclaimed had a close resemblance to racial hygiene, to eugenics. The woman should be the equal of the man but her task was to be the mother of the new race. The love which transcended sensuality was scarcely for her.

The great city was primarily a city of the most faithful friends. Whitman seems to have exhausted the possibilities of the English vocabulary in an effort to express a congenial relationship between men. "Friendship," "companionship," "comradeship," were not enough for him. He had to coin his own word—"adhesiveness." He had to borrow a Spanish word "Camerado." Finally even "democracy" was interpreted as a most intimate kind of harmonious relations between men. Whitman's democracy is a society of friendship. In the *Calamus* poems, where his belief in "manly attachment" and "athletic love" seems to modern readers most frankly revealed, he declares:

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies;

I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,

By the love of comrades,

By the manly love of comrades.

Whitman's disciples often advocate something which they call collectivism. This is his collectivism. Was his "adhesiveness" understood at home? In the field armies of Sparta and Thebes it was once recognized and honored; behind the barbed wire in the Siberian prison camps it was known, but hardly clothed in honor. In a world where there are women it has a dubious place. And yet it will gain a foothold even there. In the spiritual region where women are primarily "heroic mothers," there is often a place for "adhesiveness." In such cases it goes under the name of "Gemeinschaft." The most fanatical dreams of "Volksgemeinschaft" are related to Whitman's dreams of "democracy." He and his kindred spirit and disciple, D. H. Lawrence, have, not without reason—perhaps not without results—been dear to many young Germans. Whitman also dreamed of the race; he was stanchly opposed to racial hatred, but in peace-time the nobly born Spartan companions-in-arms kept comradely feeling alive by hunting slaves.

Whitman yearned above all else for the great "Camerado." This became the symbol for everything he longed for—finally even for death. Actually he never found his comrade—not even in Lin-

coln, who was one of the first to appreciate his poetry, though he did not share Whitman's pathology. Many Germans have undoubtedly found in "der Führer" their great "Camerado." In a magnificent threnody Whitman lamented Lincoln's death for the loss to the great cause, the union of the country, but extravagant friendship for the Negro had no part in it. At this time, partly through Carlyle's influence, but certainly also under the impress of the fallen leader, Whitman's democracy became a forge for the production of "great individuals." Such a democracy could be accepted even by our contemporary anti-democrats.

There was a time when it was believed that the bard from Paumanok, that prophet of identity, was exactly the same as Walt Whitman from Long Island. The bard and the man labored to establish this idea as firmly as possible. Whitman's uncompromising frankness in his poetry indicated that he had completely revealed himself there. But some so-called frank people like to show their inner souls in order to emphasize the fact that the trap-door to the inner sanctum is well-hidden. They wish to keep the secret to themselves. Probably at one time that was Whitman's half-conscious hope. But those who do not go that far often give away the existence of the trap-door by talking too conspicuously in front of it. This is very nearly true of Whitman. But in the end he was not unfamiliar with a more conscious frankness. Those who have something to hide often conceal it best by freely revealing it. Anyone who does not believe that Whitman intended to deceive is either not worth considering or too sharp-witted to be deceived. And people with such insight are the last to condemn. They have seen more deeply into the human heart, their own and others, than the near-sighted so-called moralist's glance ever penetrates.

That Whitman, this herald of a new, strong, and complete humanity, was himself a weak and shattered man is almost obvious. The only surprising thing is that anyone should have been deceived by such a common-place occurrence as a weak person trying to conceal his weakness by strong language. But it is very nearly a tell-tale characteristic.

Canaan never looked more beautiful than from Nebo. The sunny world envisioned by Whitman, in which strong men united with women in sensuality and with other men in intimate comradeship, all traveling forward on the great highway toward ever-new

goals, was actually not for him. He was not at all a strong man; he was really not much of a man; he desired no woman and what he wanted from men was more than comradeship. He was not even a traveler. That is his secret. It is not necessary to hunt out the reminiscences of his private life which he forgot to eliminate, or to interpret his dream-like poetry according to the Freudian school—even without this his secret is still accessible. He gives it freely to anyone who can read his book with understanding. The caution which, according to his own account, a phrenologist once ascribed to him was not enough when the urge to confess gripped him.

This man who would clasp the whole cosmos in his arms, went through life with an empty heart, a longing for a friend to love and be loved by. He did not ask for women. The woman in his life was his mother, as it usually is in such cases. Normally a man does not love his mother as he loves some other woman. But Whitman could see women only as mothers. That was probably the reason he had no business with them.

So it was from men he sought what others seek from women. That was his most dangerous secret. He could only express his unsatisfied yearning in a symbolic poem like "Out of the Cradle." It is his own sorrow and yearning which rocks with the waves in the gripping poem in which the abandoned bird laments "We two together no more." It is the song of a hermit in the great desert.

Unfortunately he was not, like Vitalis, content to sing of his own loneliness. His poems in the Calamus section betray all too clearly the inclination behind his dream of a "City of Friends." His caution deserted him there. He must now and then sing out clearly. And in his naivete he never completely understood the peculiarity of his situation, even though he was aware of the importance of concealing it. Confronted with Symonds's challenge, he revealed that although unmarried he was the father of six children—truly a desperate attempt to dispel all doubt of his virility.

The love which never found expression in a relationship with another man, overflowed and became a love which included everything. And during the American Civil War when Whitman devoted himself to nursing the sick, with the self-sacrificing tenderness which broke his health, his affectionate impulses found a satisfactory release that probably saved his soul. And in Lincoln he at last found something of his "great Camerado."

Whitman was in some ways an abortive man. His boundless ego, his rapture over the nakedness of the body, his uncertain sexual attitude, all evidence his immaturity. But especially reminiscent of childhood is his wonder, that fresh look of surprise which sees everything, highest as well as lowest, in a mystical light. The abortive in Whitman which gave his life something of a tragedy is in its effect a requisite of his greatness as a poet and as a human being.

Camels, hippopotamuses, and gorillas are in a certain sense more fully adjusted than human beings. They run, swim, or climb better. They have strayed further from their origin. A human being more closely resembles its own embryo. Is there not something similar in most human beings? They stay nearer to childhood. There are so-called intellectuals who are proud of their intellectualism. They have turned from the great highway of humanity. It is the task of those child-like, primordial and therefore more human creatures to show them the way back, the only way which leads forward. Primitivism ought to frighten the race instinctively from turning aside from the way of endless development. But Negroes are scarcely better guides than camels and hippopotamuses and gorillas. Culture belongs to humanity, but the highest culture is cultivated primitivism, a re-won spirituality. It is a kingdom into which none enters without having become as a child.

Primitivism is a dogma for those who stray too far from the origin of the race. The preaching of primitivism itself can be as disconcerting as the experience of belittling one's self in order to exalt a friend and having him agree. The primitivism of the primitive is as convincing as a thief's idea of ownership. And it has about as much charm. Conscious primitivism is an innocence which is no longer innocent.

There are Whitman disciples who present this mixed impression. He himself scarcely gives it. His abortiveness appears on the one hand as a primitivism from which flows all his human richness, but on the other hand as an arrested development that made a happy life impossible for him. The compulsion to renounce gave his desire its wild strength. Pathos means suffering. Basically, Whitman's primitivism springs from his repressed impulse to outlive the primitive in him. But the motive is confused. And the melody [of his song] is certainly too seductive.

[Here follows a discussion of Frederik Schyberg's *Walt Whitman*, which adds little to the above essay, except to show how much Schyberg influenced the author.]

Approach to Whitman Through Wergeland*

By Kjell Krogvig

Translated by Sigrid Moe

His love of humanity is all-embracing, but his perspective on the human race is often cool and distant, even bitter. Compassionate by nature, and with a capacity for sympathy of unique depth, he often has touches that are gruesome and at times he is brutal in treatment. He eulogizes life and immortality but pictures corruption and annihilation with a wealth of detail which approaches obsession. He is possessed by faith and doubt in equal proportions and is at the same time arrogant and proud, vain and humble. In his soul the clay struggles with the spirit, the shadow with the sunshine, earthy amorousness with heavenly purity, anxious sighs with an eternity of peace. And, though according to his own words, he was a mere poet, he entered whole-heartedly into all the affairs of his day.

THESE WORDS, WHICH SO STRIKINGLY point up the contrasts in Henrik Wergeland's rich mind, are taken from an essay by Anders Wyller on Wergeland's poem "Fölg kallet" [Follow the Calling]. This essay is found in Wyller's posthumous collection of articles and speeches entitled "Kjempende humanisme" [Humanism at War]. But all the fore-going might equally well have been said about the Walt Whitman whom we learn to know in "Song of Myself," which just this year [1948] appeared in Per Arneberg's translation. And if one places these two giants side by side, it is perfectly obvious to any Norwegian that the way to an understanding of this remarkable American is through an understanding of our great Norwegian poet. The similarity between the two goes much deeper than the spiritual affinity naturally existing between two men of genius, and if one did not know it to be an impossibility, one might be tempted to speak of direct influences. In a search for the underlying reasons for this similarity we must examine the purposes of these two poets and the place of each in his own milieu.

They were practically contemporaries, with a difference of only eleven years in their ages. To be sure, their environments were radically different. Wergeland was the son of a preacher and belonged to the upper class, while Whitman was the son of a poor farmer and carpenter. Wergeland died young and Whitman became an old man. But each of them worked on his own particular mas-

*"Till Whitman Gjennem Wergeland," *Samtiden*, 57 Aarg., Heft 3 (1948), pp. 196-202. Published by kind permission of *Samtiden*.

terpiece which neither completed to his own satisfaction. Whitman published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 when he was thirty-seven, and up to the time of his death he continued with revisions on this work. Wergeland brought out *Skabelsen, Mennesket, og Messias* [The Creation, Man, and Messiah] in 1830, at the age of twenty-two, and like Whitman, he never finished revising his work to his complete satisfaction. Much of what he wrote afterwards is a repetition and an extension of this central work, which he finally revised on his death-bed.

There was perhaps no great similarity in their outward lives, but their poetic inspiration was dipped from the same spring. Both Wergeland and Whitman stepped forth from young struggling nations, and each one felt in his veins the coursing vigor of his own people. These two nations were at this time the freest and most democratic in the entire world, and this freedom gave the two poets an overweening strength and a wild courage to maintain the human rights which their people had won. Their faith in the evolutionary process had no bounds; in liberty and democracy they envisioned boundless possibilities for human development, and each one looked upon himself as a standard-bearer in the struggle to defend the liberties his youthful nation had won. Whitman championed his red and black brothers; Wergeland fought for the Norwegian constitution and Norwegian nationalism.

Their own periods found difficulty in following these two in their wild flights and in their apocalyptic visions; their compeers, who had more than enough with the daily struggle, could sense their deep human warmth. Posterity, too, has found them hard to understand because they both indulged in the careless imagery of genius; yet each one has been in his own particular country the foundation for later literature, and each has been a creative force in shaping the independent culture of his own young nation.

From the religious standpoint there is superficially much to distinguish Wergeland and Whitman, but a closer view reveals that the differences lie more especially in the milieu and background. Wergeland made his debut in a young nation and in an old tradition-bound society. Whitman did not have this dead weight to struggle with; he had no strong roots either in faith or in tradition; he stood absolutely independent in his relationship to God and to society. He did not view God as creator and omnipotent ruler of the universe; to Whitman God did not reveal himself outside of nature and of the human spirit. And man himself could become

deity because man is a spirit which embraces all. For Wergeland, nature and the human spirit were also of God, even if only a small fragment of Him; God Himself ranked considerably higher as the ruling power in the universe. In the term "God," Wergeland included the Christian God, while Whitman also included the God of the Indians and of the Negro. Among the wild primitive children of nature Whitman found the uncorrupted spirit and the liberated human being, who, in effect, is God. Whitman had lived in direct contact with primitive people and had discovered that their stronger feelings for nature, for the super-natural, and for the forces of nature made them more receptive and responsive to everything that surrounded them. Wergeland attempted to find this same primitivism in the peasant and the laborer and he recognized and extolled their simple child-like faith; but he did not delve into their intimate pagan contact with nature. But even if the two had varying concepts of God, there is a close agreement in their concepts of nature and in their worship of everything from the smallest blade of grass to the myriads of stars in the heavenly dome.

Also in form and imagery, Wergeland was bound by tradition, while Whitman stood untrammeled. It was not the spirits which spoke through Whitman but rather nature directly. It is for this reason that Wergeland could never give such a frank testimony as the one Walt Whitman gives in the opening lines of "Song of Myself." Here Whitman is humanity as a whole; that is to say, sheer primitive humanity, the child of nature; and it is nature herself which speaks through primitive humanity. Wergeland also was the mouthpiece of the universe but he had to speak through the spirits of God and of the Messiah. It is the elements themselves which through man's awakened senses bring nature to Walt Whitman; these elements fill him full and he warbles forth the song of nature to humanity. Those who follow him in his song will experience the great all-embracing miracle, not through Walt Whitman but through his inmost being, for nothing is greater than the human being. In addition, he says, we must always remember that instinct is everything. This instinct we must accept as we are, primitive, clean, and naked in body and in soul. At this point, thinking will not avail; speculation is useless, for nothing is large or small; there is no beginning or end; nothing new or old. All is now and all is eternal.

If we go with him further into the poem we discover that it is thus also that he regards his own soul, liberated from the daily

humdrum of existence and surrendering itself to the contemplation of the miracles of nature. The soul has nothing to do with this daily humdrum but is bound to nature, through which it arrives at a mood full of peace and knowledge of "all the arguments of earth." Then the soul is at peace both with humanity and with the spirit of God.

Wergeland was not able to go quite this far in a blending of nature, spirit, and humanity, but when these two poets seek God in nature, they again stand on the same ground. The child, the human seed, the grass of the field, the lowliest thing alive is a revelation of God, and death exists for none of them. Everything continues onward; nothing is annihilated or disappears.

But at this point Walt Whitman is forced one step further; he admits that the spirit is more than this; it is beyond birth and death. Like Wergeland, he places goodness and love above the earthly, goodness for both the fortunate and the unfortunate. To the spirit nothing is damned or beyond redemption; the spirit represents love, fertility, desire, fulfillment, and happiness. It is this which takes possession of Whitman and gives him inspiration, and in this poem he exults in jubilant praise for this gift of nature. All of life is perfect, he says further, the groping love-life and ecstasy, the life of the child of nature and of the laborer and of the Negro in his bodily perfection. The essence of the life is spirit; even the humblest life is of greater consequence than all the eloquence of the world can express. Spirit and nature are, nevertheless, not quite the same, but the spirit understands the voice of nature, knows its place in the universe and is subject to the same laws; it is the "common air that bathes the globe."

Both Wergeland and Whitman understand their own particular genius and both suffer from the knowledge that they cannot gain the entire world as audience. Wergeland was bitter over being born in a small country and being able to reach so few with his poetry, he who had both a European and a universal viewpoint. Whitman had the advantage of writing in a world language but had the disadvantage of living in pioneer society which had little appreciation or taste for his universality. He loved and eulogized this country and its rich natural resources and he realized its enormous potentialities. He sang for this strong primitive people about their great future, and was tortured by their refusal to take the time to listen to him. They both possessed boundless self-confidence and each felt within himself the limitless potentialities of his own

spirit. But within his own limitations, each one ranged free and unconfined.

If we continue further in this poem [“Song of Myself”] we hear Whitman say that his spirit is deathless and limitless because he himself is a part of primitive nature. He is the earth itself as well as the loved one who on the night of nights shall come and create the passionate life of the mystic. It is quite natural for him to be at the same time materialist and realist. But it is time alone which makes everything come to pass and everything perfect, and the eternal gives freedom and liberation. But the great wonder in his soul would slay him unless he could give utterance to it and sing it forth to humanity at large.

In his poetic impulses and creative joy, Whitman can be as crude and as barbaric as Wergeland, but like him he reveals at the same time a tender compassion for everything frail, pure, and innocent. But when he expounds his naturalism, nothing can stop him, least of all calm reason, practical advice, and narrow criticism. He probably has only partial control over what the spirit has to communicate to him, but he knows that what he has to say is of the spirit and is therefore the truth. And thus a transmutation is created in him; the spirit talks through him to humanity and humanity in turn sings its songs in his songs and poses to him the great riddle “that we call being.” And his answer is: “Only he who knows all, feels all, can really know what Being is.” Wergeland, too, must be able to identify himself with other human beings, express himself, give of his own strength, give all in human content, and fulfill the law of fertility. The progress of life is like the free flight of birds; Whitman himself is one with the animals and birds because, like them, he has no consciousness of evil. Love is the only thing he can assimilate because he himself loves everything from the lowest creeping thing and the most depraved human being up to the deathlessness of his own soul. Not until he has eliminated the self does he know for a certainty that he really exists. Not until then has he become a part of nature and of the life and emotions of humanity.

When he has thus become filled with this love, he feels drunk with joy and begins to celebrate all of humanity and its life. Now he wants to liberate humanity as a whole, and in accomplishing this he must absorb all evil, the terrors of war, and all the sufferings of humanity. But all of this becomes at length too heavy to carry. In the face of evil he is forced to surrender. Whitman, like Wergeland,

can assimilate only pure love and neither has any weapon against evil, which must be met with new evil instead of with love. For this reason Whitman looks in anticipation toward death and after death toward the resurrection, after which he hopes to be reincarnated as a pure and innocent child of nature. At this point, where he attempts to absorb into himself the emotions of the entire world regarding good and evil, he reaches the dramatic climax of the song of himself.

When he has been reincarnated as a child of nature, a slightly more peaceful happiness steals over him as he again begins to reconstruct humanity and to embrace it in its entirety with greater strength for the final miracle. He would sweep aside all ancient views of the universe, melt together all ancient religions and all of life and shape everything anew. Unlike Wergeland he does not believe in original sin nor in demoniac possession; by means of his ideal nature-child he hopes to accomplish his goal. Again he begins singing his triumphal chant, for now everything in spirit and in nature is approaching perfection. Again he commences celebrating life. Now he will arouse humanity. He insists that humanity must realize that the all-important thing is man himself and the spirit of man. God lives on through human immortality and for this reason Whitman is not afraid of death; all is form, unity, design, eternal life, and spiritual bliss. This is his gospel, and his own liberated spirit is but one expression of nature's versatility. Those who will search will find what they are looking for; and if some suppose that he contradicts himself, then that contradiction is merely proof of how all-embracing he is.

And if one goes to Walt Whitman with an open and receptive mind and good resolution, one will discover what his message is for every single human being and will be swept up by his passionate worship. One will feel his strong happiness or deep *Weltschmerz*, or his powerful love for humanity or his stormy joy in nature. There will always be some place where Walt Whitman will speak to one—so many-sided is he, so rich is his interpretation, so big in his thinking. It is for this reason that posterity has been able to dip into Whitman as we have dipped into Henrik Wergeland's rich spirit.

And because everyone finds something for himself in his poetry and everyone reads him according to his own particular needs and moods, every reader will interpret him according to his own ideas. To translate a poem like Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" is, therefore, a hopeless task even for the most sensitive poet. If one

were to penetrate to the uttermost limit of his visions, the inmost emotions of his soul, one could go on and analyze him in large erudite tomes, after which there would hardly be anything left of Walt Whitman, the poet.

Per Arneberg has done the only thing possible; he has employed Walt Whitman's own formula; he has filled himself with the poet's moods, visions, and images, and has given them out again in the way that they have touched his own mind. It is quite natural that he should have taken on this almost impossible task. He himself is the latest flowering of the long Wergeland tradition in our literature. He has surely sensed his relationship to this great American mind, and for this reason his interpretation will be the most faithful that is possible. Fortunately he has not reduced Walt Whitman to easy reading; here [in this translation as in the original English] we must follow the words of the poet, approach him with an open mind, must receive and experience the miracle.

Whitman in Russia

By Stephen Stepanchev

IT WOULD BE difficult to overestimate the importance of Walt Whitman in the history of Russian letters of the past fifty years. His audience, reputation, and influence have been enormous. Kornei Chukovsky's translations from *Leaves of Grass* were published in editions of ten, twenty, and fifty thousand copies; Soviet critics have for decades honored the poet as a high-priest of democratic idealism and as a saint of the Revolution of 1917; and his influence on the practice of Russian poets, especially in the 1910's and 1920's, was felt both in choice of subject matter and in verse technique. Rightly or wrongly, the Russians have identified Whitman with their own revolutionary struggle; in his emphasis on a democratic future, in his optimism, his sense of the equality and essential divinity of all men they have recognized the tone of their own convictions and aspirations.

In view of this identification, it is not surprising that Whitman should have come into prominence in Russia in the early years of the century, when the social malaise and ferment of the times (expressed so admirably in the work of Chekhov) led to the abortive revolution of 1905. Indeed, interest in Whitman before 1900 was tentative and sporadic, kept alive in literary circles by the intriguing fact that the government censorship forbade any reference to him and the fact that he was achieving considerable fame in Western Europe.

The first mention of Whitman in Russia came in 1861, the year after the publication of the third American edition of *Leaves of Grass*. An anonymous reviewer of foreign novels for *Otechestven-*

niye Zapiski (*Annals of the Fatherland*) mistook the poet's work for a novel and, in commenting on the furore that *Leaves of Grass* had created in England, remarked:

The attacks are concerned with the moral aspect of the novel. "He should be printed on dirty paper, as is appropriate for a book intended chiefly for police scrutiny," said one critic. "This is the emancipation of the flesh!" exclaimed another.

This amusing Russian echo of gentility's battle against Whitman received no reinforcement, however. More than twenty years passed before the poet was again called to the attention of the reading public, this time by way of John Swinton's lecture on American literature. A translation of it appeared in *Zagranichnyi Vestnik* (*Foreign Herald*) in 1882. Then, in March, 1883, N. Popov published an article on "Uolt Guitman" in *Zagranichnyi Vestnik* which was the first Russian estimate of the American poet and a rhapsodic tribute:

Who is this Walt Whitman? He is the spirit of revolt and pride, Milton's Satan. He is Goethe's Faust, but a happier one. It seems to him that he has solved the riddle of life; he is drunk with life, such as it is; he extols birth equally with death because he sees, knows, senses immortality. This inquiring naturalist arrives at rapture through the lessons of putrid corpses as much as through a vision of fragrant flowers. "Every life is composed of thousands of corpses!" he exclaimed.

The censors found this commentary alarmingly decadent, put the author in prison, and suspended the magazine for the rest of the year.

But, despite the censorship, Whitman had some readers during this period. Ivan Turgenev was so moved by Whitman's poems that he offered to translate a few of them for E. Ragozin, editor of *Nedeli* (*The Week*). In a letter to his friend P. V. Annenkov, he wrote: "To Ragozin, together with portions of *Sketches of a Sportsman*, I am sending some translated verses of the astonishing American poet Walt Whitman (have you heard of him?) with a short introduction." Unfortunately, Turgenev put his work on Whitman aside, and the non-English-reading public had to wait until 1907 for a book of translations from *Leaves of Grass*. That Turgenev continued to be interested in Whitman, however, is clear from the fact that he spoke of him to an American writer (possibly Henry James) in Paris, in 1874, remarking that although there was a great deal of chaff in the poet's work there was also good grain.

Another of Whitman's readers was Leo Tolstoy, whose reactions were likewise mixed. On receiving a gift copy of *Leaves of Grass* in 1889, he wrote in his diary: "Received book: Whitman—

ugly verses." But later, when R. W. Collis, an Irish admirer, sent Tolstoy a copy of an Irish edition and suggested that there were similarities between his ideas and Whitman's, Tolstoy took the trouble to read the book and found a number of admirable poems to underline, such as "I Dreamed in a Dream" in the "Calamus" section. In his diary he remarked that Whitman was empty much of the time, but that now and then he was good. By 1890 he was clearly interested in winning a Russian audience for the poet, as in that year he wrote to Leo Nikiforov, the translator, that Whitman "is already very famous in Europe, but among us he is virtually unknown. And an essay about him with a selection of translated poems would, I think, be acceptable to every journal, to *Russkaya Mysl' (Russian Thought)*, I believe." Unhappily, Nikiforov failed to respond to this suggestion. But Tolstoy's ambivalent attitude toward Whitman can be seen most clearly in his remark to Aylmer Maude, his English translator, that Whitman lacked a philosophy of life and his later listing of the poet (in 1900) among those American authors who are important to world literature.

After N. Popov's unhappy experience with the tsarist censorship in 1883, there was no public notice of Whitman until 1892, the year of his death. In that year obituary articles appeared in at least three Russian periodicals: *Nablyudatel' (The Observer)*, *Bibliograficheskiy Zapiski (Bibliographic Annals)*, and *Knizhki Nedeli (Book Week)*. The last-mentioned journal characterized Whitman as "the American Tolstoy" and as "the most remarkable of North American poets." But in the same year an article in the *Brockhaus-Efron Entsiklopedicheski Slovar (Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary)* attacked him for his "chaotic unfamiliarity with thought" and his "anti-artistic methods." Later in the decade, in 1896 and 1898, Whitman received the favorable attention of Dioneo (pseudonym of Isaac Shklovsky), a correspondent in England who wrote articles on English and American literature for Russian magazines. He spoke of the wide audience that Whitman had won in England, America, and Australia, of his "classical talent," his superiority over Nietzsche, and of his altruistic democracy. "Whitman speaks of the widest, universal altruism," he said.

But, notwithstanding all these indications of interest, the fact remains that Whitman was little known and little read in Russia during the nineteenth century.

Then, during the first decade of the twentieth, he was swept up in literary and political currents as Russia's great revolutionary

generation discovered its war slogans. Whitman's emphasis on pioneering, on building a new, democratic future, on brotherhood and equality elicited a warm response both from youthful Marxists and from partisans of a gentler, more middle-class orientation. Numerous writers and journals assisted in relating Whitman to the Russian *zeitgeist*, in making him a contemporary Russian poet, but the two most avid publicists were Konstantin Balmont, himself a distinguished symbolist poet, and Kornei Chukovsky, devoted Whitman scholar who has seen his translations from *Leaves of Grass* go through ten editions, the most recent in 1944.

Konstantin Balmont began his translations from Whitman in 1903 and completed them in 1905 to the sound of revolutionary guns, as he said. He published them in the literary magazines *Vessy* (*The Scales*) and *Pereval* (*Mountain Pass*), together with commentaries in which he tried to elucidate Whitman's ideas and technique. In 1911 the poems were collected and published under the title of *Pobegi Travy* (*Shoots of Grass*) in an edition of 1500 copies. The book was prefaced by an enthusiastic, Whitmanesque essay, "Polarity," which Balmont had printed in *Sovremenny Mir* (*Contemporary World*) in 1910.

In his articles on Whitman Balmont tried, on the one hand, to explain the American poet's neglect in Russia and, on the other hand, to justify a much greater measure of interest in him. In "The Bard of Individuality and Life," an essay that appeared in *Vessy* in July, 1904, he pointed out that Whitman was unread because of his indifference to European literary forms and because of the absence from his work of conventional elements of "beauty." He also noted that many purely American details, local color, provided a barrier to understanding. But he insisted that Whitman was even more worthy of Russian attention than his "aristocratic" compatriot, Edgar Allan Poe, of whom the Russian public was very fond. In comparison with Poe Whitman may be chaotic, undisciplined, but

He takes us to the morning of world-making and gives us a sense of the tremendous creative expanse of earth and sea. . . . He sings of freedom, of his young country chaotically moving toward the building of new forms of life. Sensing himself new, he rejects the old, and, above all, being a poet of the future, he rejects old forms of verse. . . . He sings the simple, powerful ego of a young race. . . . Whitman's democracy shows itself in great part not as a political manifestation, but, rather, as a form of religious enthusiasm. . . . He is a poet of individuality, of unlimited life, and a harmonious joining of all separate personalities with the Universal One.

In the preface to his *Pobegi Travy* Balmont pursued these ideas, but gave them a more explicitly political formulation when he said that the poet was "a part, and a strong part, of that future which is swiftly coming toward us, which is, indeed, already being made in the present. Ideal Democracy. Full Sovereignty of the People. . . . Whitman spoke of it."

Balmont's contemporaries did not question these sentiments, but some of them, notably his rival, Kornei Chukovsky, objected to his translations. The chief charge leveled against them was that they were too literary, too pretty, too full of symbolist embellishment that contradicted Whitman's simplicity of phrase and rhythm. Chukovsky pointed out that Balmont's fear of simplicity can be seen in the very title of the book, which is *Pobegi Travy* (*Shoots of Grass*) instead of *List'ya Travy* (*Leaves of Grass*). The second charge leveled at him was that his knowledge of English was so rudimentary that he made inexcusable errors in translation. Balmont had remarked in the preface to his book that he had observed the most scrupulous exactitude in his labors, "having recourse to paraphrase only where my literary perception was absolutely necessary," but Chukovsky noted that Balmont had translated *lilacs* as *lilies* and *a column of figures as figures on columns*. He showed, too, that Whitman's line about women, *they are ultimate in their own rights*, was incorrectly rendered as *they know how to issue ultimatums*. "These are not women," Chukovsky said wryly, "but diplomats of enemy countries." Chukovsky's third charge against Balmont was that he sometimes substituted a generality for the concreteness of the original text. Where Whitman had written "my Mississippi" or "prairies in Illinois" or "my prairies on the Missouri," Balmont had preferred some all-inclusive phrase such as "rivers and fields and dales."

That there is much justification for Chukovsky's strictures on Balmont's work is clear to any impartial student, and it should be noted that Soviet encyclopedias and literary histories echo the opinion that the symbolist poet's translations were "unsuccessful." However, in the first decade of the century Balmont had his champions, and when Chukovsky attacked him in an article in the October, 1906, issue of *Vessy*, he drew a long and vehement reply from an outraged reader, Elena T. Their correspondence was published in the December issue of the magazine. Balmont had another defender in M. Nevedomsky, a writer for *Sovremenny Mir*, who asserted in an article "On the Art of Our Days and the Art of the

Future" (in the April, 1909, issue) that Balmont's translations were "more reliable" than Chukovsky's.

It is undeniable, however, that Kornei Chukovsky is the foremost Whitman scholar in Russia and that his translations and articles in the crucial first decade of the century helped to establish Whitman in his high position in Russian letters. In the preface to his sixth (1923) edition of *Uot Uitmen i Ego List'ya Travy: Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii* (*Walt Whitman and His Leaves of Grass: Poetry of the Future Democracy*), Chukovsky described the first years of his campaign in behalf of Walt Whitman:

When I began to publicize Walt Whitman in Russia one of the newspapers declared that there had never been such a poet and that I had simply thought him up. The article indeed began in this way: "Chukovsky invented Walt Whitman." The name of the American bard was known only to a narrow circle of readers, chiefly esthetes-symbolists. The form of his verses seemed so slovenly and awkward that at first not a single journal would agree to print my translations.

Chukovsky confessed that, in his eagerness to win an audience for Whitman, he resorted to bowdlerization: he corrected Whitman's verses and added rhymes and, in general, misrepresented the poet to a far greater degree than Balmont ever did. A few of these mis-translations can be found in the old magazine *Nive* (*Fields*). The scholar indicated, too, that he had had some trouble with the censorship, particularly in 1905, but declared that

I continued to preach the gospel of Whitman everywhere, and there was no publication, it seemed, in which I did not print an article about him or translations from *Leaves of Grass*. I wrote about him for the journal *Odesskie Novosti* [*Odessa News*] (1904), the almanac *Mayak* [*The Lighthouse*] (1906), the journal *Vessy* (1906), the gazette *Rech'* [*Speech*] (1909, 1911), the gazette *Russkoe Slovo* [*The Russian Word*] (1913), the journal *Russkaya Mysl'* [*Russian Thought*], the gazette *Narodnyi Vestnik* [*The People's Messenger*] and, it seems, in tens of others.

But Chukovsky's chief contribution to Whitman scholarship during the early 1900's was his 1907 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the first in Russia. The work was called *Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii: Uot Uitmen* (*Poetry of the Future Democracy: Walt Whitman*).¹ It was reviewed favorably by Yuly Eichenwald in the August, 1907, issue of *Russkaya Mysl'*, though the reviewer brushed aside Chukovsky's characterization of Whitman as an apostle of democracy and made him an advocate of anarchism instead. Eichenwald saw Whitman as a great, free, titanic father-figure:

Above us, who are exhausted by doubts, who are growing small through our petty labor and worry, above us, Lilliputian souls, rises the master-

ful self-confidence of a great man. And when one finds himself near him, one wants to talk not in his ordinary, quiet voice, but louder and louder; he wishes to imitate his energetic speech, which is without redundancy and connectives, without disgusting softness. . . . Huge, loud, titanic, he differs from us in that we feel ourselves children, that our view of the world is childish, submissive, and Whitman is the father.

During the second decade of the century, a turbulent time of world war and successful revolution, public interest in Whitman was so great that three new editions of Chukovsky's translations from *Leaves of Grass* appeared. In 1914, 3,000 copies were printed of the second edition of *Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii: Uot Uitmen*, with an introduction by I. E. Repin, the painter. The third edition, of 5,000 copies, was published in Petrograd in 1918 with an epilogue by the Marxist critic, A. Lunacharsky. And in the following year the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Red Army Deputies issued 50,000 copies of the fourth edition. With this tremendous printing it can be said that Whitman had finally achieved an audience in Russia.

It should be added that several pamphlets and broadsides containing Whitman's verses were published in the years 1918-1923. Some of these were distributed to Red Army troops and workers manning trenches and barricades. Among them was a translation by "M. S.," *Pionery (Pioneers)*, issued as a four-page pamphlet in Petrograd in an edition of 1,000 copies. Another was a broadside, *V Boi Pospeshim My Skorei (We Shall Hurry to Battle)*, printed in an edition of 1,000 copies in Tot'ma, a town in northern Russia on the route to the Archangel revolutionary front.

In these years, though Whitman was enlisted in the revolutionary struggle, there was no consistent view of his political and social thought. Some critics, like M. Nevedomsky and Yuly Eichenwald in the first decade, saw him as an anarcho-socialist; others, like Chukovsky, his most careful student, described him as a democratic individualist; still others, like I. E. Repin, emphasized his Christianity. Repin's point of view was, briefly, this: "I do not believe that this religion of brotherhood, unity, equality, is so new, indeed, as K. I. Chukovsky imagines; it was manifested to the whole world nearly twenty hundred years ago." Repin saw Whitman as counteracting the malignant influence of Nietzsche's cult of "selfishness." Individualism among the Russians, according to Repin, was characterized by rowdyism, rapine, and suicide, and he expected Whitman to give the death-blow to this kind of individualism, "for he is the poet of union, brotherhood, love."

But the most common view was essentially Marxist. In the eyes of the Socialists and Communists, Whitman was, as Prof. Vladimir Friche put it, "the singer of equal value and equal rights of men, of international solidarity"; he "sang the big city, the hurly-burly of its streets, the ceaseless labor of machines, the working people and the folk mass, the busy life of an industrial-democratic society." Maxim Gorky went even further, however, maintaining that Whitman, after his disillusionment with bourgeois democracy in the 1870's, advocated revolution: Whitman "began with individualism and quietism" and then "came over to socialism, to the preaching of activism." A. Lunacharsky, too, made an effort to draw the poet into the Communist fold:

Whitman is a man with an open heart. Many will be like him when they break out of their one-man prisons, the prisons of individualism and possessions. . . . Communism carries a radiance with it. . . . Communism puts man in his place. Man awakes and happily realizes his destiny—he is a being conscious and immortal, completing the universal architecture. Immortal. Man is immortal. Though the individual dies. He who does not understand this does not understand Whitman either. In the sphere of politics and economics communism is a struggle against private property with all its hereditary governmental, ecclesiastical, and cultural superstructure. And in the realm of the spirit it is an effort to discard the pitiful envelope "I" and discover a being who is winged with love, immortal, fearless, like Whitman—possessing the shape of a great, all-embracing man.

It was during this period of war rumors, war, and revolution that Whitman exerted his first influence on the practice of Russian poets. He had been greatly admired by the symbolists, particularly by Balmont, but he had had very little effect on their poetry. Now, in the second decade of the century, he was taken up by Moscow and St. Petersburg circles of "futurists" who strongly opposed the conventional esthetic of the past and espoused a rough, masculine, even coarse verse line. They hailed Whitman for his loud, brash, swaggering poetry, "the poetry of the future," and did him the honor of imitating him. Among these futurists was Velemir Hlebnikov, whose poem "Sad" ("The Garden") shows Whitman's influence. According to Chukovsky, Hlebnikov liked to listen to Whitman's poems read in English, "even though he did not fully understand the English language." Two other luminaries wearing Whitman's cloak at this time were Mihail Larionov, who regarded Whitman as his collaborator in undermining the bases of traditional esthetics, and Ivan Oredzh, a St. Petersburg Whitmanian who at times parodied the master.

Preeminent among the futurists was Vladimir Mayakovsky, who in the years immediately succeeding the Revolution became a major Russian poet. In his formative years he liked and imitated Whitman; he was impressed by his "spirited vulgarity," the free, rather conversational language, the phrasing of average men. His poem "Chelovek" ("Man") comes closest to Whitman's rhythms and diction, according to Chukovsky, who introduced the poet to Whitman's work in 1913. But Mayakovsky was not wholly satisfied with the poems of the American, for he once told Chukovsky that some of his lines were flabbily made and, on another occasion, that Whitman was not true to himself in his struggle to achieve a revolutionary form of art. It seems that Mayakovsky regarded himself as the more masculine and powerful of the two. He developed an idiom and a voice of his own, but most Russian critics are quick to agree that Whitman played no small part in that development.

In the 1920's, years of construction and reconstruction in Russia, Whitman maintained his hold on the reading public. The fifth edition of Chukovsky's translations from *Leaves of Grass*, in a printing of 4,000 copies, was published in 1922 under the title of *List'ya Travy. Proza* (*Leaves of Grass. Prose*). In this edition selected passages from *Democratic Vistas* and other prose writings of Whitman were included for the first time. In the following year the sixth edition, in a printing of 5,000 copies, made its appearance; it was entitled *Uot Uitmen i Ego List'ya Travy: Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii* (*Walt Whitman and His Leaves of Grass: Poetry of the Future Democracy*). It should be noted that, in addition to these two editions, copies of older editions were still available to the public in book stores and libraries. Indicative of popular interest in Whitman was the fact that he was quoted frequently in the newspapers and that his verses were published in various anthologies of poems for recitation by school children. Interesting, too, is the fact that "actors of proletarian culture" in Archangel dramatized and acted his poem "Europe." William Parry reports that in Baku poems by Whitman were distributed as morale builders to oil workers engaged in reconstructing the oil industry. In 1921-22 the Bureau of Public Enlightenment issued large, brightly colored calendars (20" by 30" in size) in the style of those previously distributed by mail-order firms or by periodicals. These calendars had formerly displayed a large Pieta surrounded by various saints, martyrs, and angels. The Soviet version had a large likeness of Lenin in the center and a border of portraits of men and women whose writ-

ings had contributed to revolutionary thought. Marx sat directly above Lenin, just as the Holy Ghost had wavered above Christ in the old pictures. Among the influential men in the border area were Carlyle, Lincoln, Paine, and Walt Whitman.

As could be surmised, Russia's poets were active during this era of revolutionary triumph and experimentation, and among them Whitman was a god. They liked the brash, proletarian flavor of his verse and his free-ranging subject matter. Through him they learned that they could write about anything; there was no "poetic" subject matter or diction. The Whitman influence was so sweeping, indeed, that in his comments on the poet in the sixth edition of his translation Chukovsky remarked that

The poetry of Whitman has emerged from the covers of his small book and become an air that many poets in Russia breathe. . . . In recent years, since the Revolution, the influence of Whitman has spread so widely that it is impossible (and, indeed, unnecessary) to point to individual poets who are not under his influence.

And, as in the pre-war period, students and poets began to organize literary circles in his name.

In the years after 1929 and the implementation of the first Five Year Plan the Russian literary scene was shaken by controversies over "content" and "form" and "Socialist realism." One group maintained that writers should be allowed to experiment with form and content as they pleased, while another group, and the dominant one, insisted that writers should reject the "formalism" of the past and concentrate on realistic reporting of the Five Year Plan and the emerging Soviet social order. Throughout these battles Whitman maintained his position of esteem, and in 1931, at the height of the controversy over "formalism," Chukovsky's *List'ya Travy* (*Leaves of Grass*) was issued in an edition of 20,000 copies. In the following year the eighth edition, called *Uot Uitmen: Izbrannye Stihotvoreniya* (*Walt Whitman: Selected Poems*) was issued in 3,000 copies with an introduction by A. Lunacharsky, now a commissar of education. The ninth edition, *List'ya Travy: Izbrannye Stihi i Poemy* (*Leaves of Grass: Selected Poems*), was published in 1935 in a printing of 10,300 copies. D. S. Mirsky wrote the introduction for this edition, as he did for an English edition of *Leaves of Grass* published in 1936, in a printing of 2,500 copies, by the Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R.

The settled Russian view of Whitman during the 1930's and 1940's was that he was the greatest American poet and a remarkable

product of American middle-class democracy of the nineteenth century. Marxist critics saw his contradictions as reflecting the contradictions of his age, as stemming from the impossibility of joining democratic idealism to a capitalist order bent on destroying democracy. An expression of this view can be found in Vol. II of the Soviet *Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya* (*Literary Encyclopedia*), edited by P. I. Lebedev-Polyansky and I. M. Nusinov:

That book [*Leaves of Grass*], the intellectual-artistic credo of Whitman, was created in an epoch that was unusually stormy and rich in social movements. It was the poetic prelude to the civil war of North and South, which cleared the path for capitalist expansion. But that expansion also limited the democracy of the American bourgeoisie in the 1850 decade.

The work of Whitman—the poet of the petty bourgeois democracy of that epoch—expresses unprecedented progress in the technical power of the bourgeoisie, its conquest of the forces of nature, and, at the same time, the illusions of the American democracy. . . .

The realism of his poetry does not exclude a deep inner contradiction in his world view. Whitman himself did not know where humanity called him: to the big cities of stone and steel or to the solitude of nature. . . .

And although Whitman, of course, was not a Socialist, the sense of collectivism is expressed with such power in his poetry that we can count him with us in our epoch of struggle for the classless society; the progressive ideas of Whitman, such as his affirmation of labor and the dignity of mankind living by labor, cannot but find a response in the Soviet reader.

A similar view was expressed in 1942 by the anonymous authors of *Luchshie Predstaviteli Angliiskoi i Amerikanskoi Literatury* (*The Best Representatives of English and American Literature*):

Whitman expressed the pathos and optimism of the American radical democracy in the middle of the nineteenth century. Toward the end of his life Whitman was disillusioned about the possibility of universal brotherhood within the framework of capitalist society.

Throughout the commentary on Whitman in the 1930's and 1940's one can also find a note of genuine affection for a poet who had played so important a role in Russian cultural history during the days of the Revolution. A feeling of nostalgia crept into articles written in 1939 to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the poet's birth, a feeling one can find underlining much of what Chukovsky had to say in an essay on Whitman that appeared in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*) for June 10, 1939. Chukovsky gave his readers an impression of Whitman's great role in Russian literary history in the 1910's and 1920's, noted his fame and popu-

larity (as M. Zverev did, too, in the *Moscow News* of June 5, 1939), and named him comrade in the antifascist crusade.

The tenth and last edition of Chukovsky's translations from Whitman was announced for publication as early as 1939 but it made its appearance as *Uolt Uitman: Izbrannye Stihotvorenniya i Proza* (*Walt Whitman: Selected Poetry and Prose*) only in 1944, toward the end of the second World War, when relations with the United States were especially cordial. The work was issued in an edition of 10,000 copies. Unfortunately, as the title indicates, the book contained selections from Walt Whitman; it was not complete. It still remains for Chukovsky or some other writer in Russia to give the reading public a complete translation of *Leaves of Grass*.

It is useless to speculate as to the role Whitman will play in the Soviet Union in the years ahead, but, looking backward, one can obviously conclude that he has had an astonishingly large impact on Russian culture during the past fifty years. Because the Russians have seen a correspondence between his ideas and their own revolutionary ethos, he has been much read and highly praised, and he has had a seminal influence on at least three generations of poets. It is not an exaggeration to say that Whitman is now a Russian as well as an American author.

Notes

¹Since Latvia was at this time a part of the Russian Empire, it should be noted that a Lettish translation of Whitman by Roberts Skarga, *Sahlu Steebri* (*Leaves of Grass*), was issued in Riga in 1908. ²In 1944 Chukovsky announced that he was writing a book on "Walt Whitman in Russian Literature," a work that would be most valuable to Whitman scholarship, but ten years later the book had not appeared.

Other Slavic Countries

By Stephen Stepanchev

WALT WHITMAN'S CAREER in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria was not as glorious or as seminal as it was in Russia, but it was, nevertheless, considerable, attesting to the remarkable vitality and inclusiveness of the poet's sentiment and message. As in Russia, Whitman was swept up in the humanitarian and radical political currents that agitated Eastern Europe during the first World War and the years thereafter; and since the second World War and the establishment of the "new democracies," he has achieved a large new public with government encouragement and increasing fame as the exponent of radical democracy.

In Poland Whitman was first mentioned in 1887 by Miriam (pseudonym of Zenon Przesmycki) in an article on "Poets in North America" that appeared in the Warsaw magazine *Życie* (*Life*). Miriam translated some of the poet's verses and remarked that they did not appeal to him, that they were full of "pseudo-poetic rhapsodies" in the cosmic style of Victor Hugo. Miriam's reaction was typical of the Polish public in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, which was so passionately interested in realism, according to Roman Dyboski, Polish critic of the 1920's, that it could hardly be sympathetic to visionary poetry which was not written in regular metrical style and in which there was no limit to the area or causes of rapture.

Thereafter translations from Whitman were occasionally published in Polish periodicals. Amazingly enough, his short stories, "The Last Loyalist" and "Death in the School Room," were printed in *Słowo Polskie* (*The Polish Word*) in 1901 and 1902, and three poems, in a translation by M. Wit, appeared in *Ateneum* (*The Atheneum*) in 1905. But it was not until 1917 and later that Whitman became an influence in Polish letters. He was taken up by the "Skamander" group of poets of which Julian Tuwim was the spokesman; they espoused new freedoms in verse technique and subject matter. Tuwim's views on Whitman were expressed in an article, "Manifesto of General Love (Walt Whitman)," which appeared in *Pro Arte et Studio R. 3* in 1917, and his indebtedness to Whitman can be seen in his frequently exclamatory verses, a sample of which is "Poezja" ("Poesy") in his *Wiersze Zebrane* (*Collected Poems*).

That Whitman had a proletarian and politically radical audience in Poland can be seen from the fact that an essay on him by Antonina Sokolicz was published in 1921 by the Warsaw Library of Working People.

Since 1921 several more articles on Whitman have appeared in Poland, as well as translations of groups of poems, most recently in the March 21, 1948, issue of *Odrodzenie* (*Regeneration*). But only two collections of Whitman's poems have been published. The first was a very small book, *Trzy Poematy* (*Three Poems*), containing "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and "Passage to India." It appeared in 1921. The poems were translated by Stanislaw de Vincenz, who saw Whitman as the poet of the religion of democracy. The only other Polish edition of Whitman is S. Napieralski's *75 Poematów* (*75 Poems*), which was printed in 1934 with an introduction by Stanislaw Helsztyński.

In Czechoslovakia the first edition of Whitman's *Stebel Travy* (*Leaves of Grass*), in a translation by Jaroslav Vrchlicky, appeared in 1906, one year earlier than Chukovsky's first Russian edition. Pavel Eisner, the translator of the second Czech edition, criticized Vrchlicky's book for its mistranslations and printer's errors. He said, too, that Vrchlicky did not understand Whitman's ideas and took a regrettably patronizing attitude toward the poet's disciples, remarking that "Walt Whitman had enemies in his wildly enthusiastic admirers." Pavel Eisner's book, *Demokracie, Ženo Má!* (*Democracy, Ma Femme!*), appeared in 1945.

The earliest translation of Whitman in Yugoslavia appeared in 1912 in the magazine *Srpski Književni Glasnik* (*Serbian Book Herald*). The poem was entitled "Mine Is a Powerful Music," and the translator was "I. A." Other translations, by Svet. Stefanovich, appeared in the same periodical in 1920; and in the January, 1925, issue an article on "Walt Whitman and Swinburne" by Bogdan Popovich appeared, violently attacking Whitman for his coarseness and stupidity and supporting Swinburne's strictures on America's "primitive." But it was not until 1951, after the establishment of Tito's Communist regime, that the first edition of Whitman's poems, *Vlati Trave* (*Leaves of Grass*), was issued in Zagreb in a translation by Tin Ujević.

In Bulgaria there was little scholarly or public interest in Whitman until after the second World War. A sign of regard for him in the new "people's democracy" can be seen in an article by

Rusi Rusev, "The Literary Judgments of Walt Whitman," which appeared in the 1946 *Sofia Universitet Istoriko-filologicheski Fakul'tet Godishnik* (*Annual of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Sofia*).

Thus it is clear that Whitman's genius has been recognized and appreciated in Eastern Europe as in other parts of the world. He has contributed to the cultural life of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria as no other nineteenth-century American author has done; he has attuned the reading public of these countries to the harmonies of the American democratic spirit, which may, after all, prove more lasting than governments and economic systems.

The Poet of Democracy: Walt Whitman*

Translated by Stephen Stepanchev

In his book, *Poetry of the Future Democracy*, K. Chukovsky provides a brilliant characterization of the work of Walt Whitman, the American poet, who commands enthusiastic followers in Western Europe and little fame among us.

"I believe that my book is timely," writes K. Chukovsky in the introduction. "We can dislike Walt Whitman, if we choose, but we must, at any rate, know him. Europe has already made use of him. Without him the history of world literature would be incomplete. In France, especially, there has been in recent years a strengthening of the cult of his spirit. . . . All poetry has turned in the direction pointed out by the American poet.

"I believe it is inevitable that the American bard will play an important role in our poetry too. Unfortunately, my efforts to make his works known in Russia have had little success up to now. Perhaps this small book will finally win a response."

We cite some of the most striking passages from K. Chukovsky's beautiful book:

"Regardless of our wishes, one of these days, if not today then tomorrow, we shall be forced to face the problem of democracy and cope with it in some way. In Europe, as in America, the springs of

*This anonymous review of the second edition of Kornei Chukovsky's translation of Whitman, *Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii: Uot Uitmen* (*Poetry of the Future Democracy: Walt Whitman*), appeared in *Bulleteni Literaturi i Zhizni* (*Bulletins of Literature and Life*), No. 22, pp. 1253-58 (July, 1914).

inspiration had dried up. Classical antiquity and medieval romanticism could no longer nourish contemporary art. Literature and art, if they were to maintain their position, had to adapt themselves to new, to changing conditions. They were compelled to find a new faith—not in an esthetic, a style, a rhythm, but in their mission, their destiny: to give concrete and forceful embodiment to the new life, to its religion and essence, and to do so as powerfully as the Greek sculptors expressed paganism and the Italian artists medieval Catholicism."

Whitman undertook to accomplish this grandiose task, asserts the author of the cited book. He was the first to understand and to declare that in our renascent world it is necessary that democracy have a religious pathos, a religious ecstasy of its own—even though in secret—and he boldly announced himself the first priest of that universal religion. That secret faith was for him the road that democracy must take, and when, at times, he saw, with amazement, that despite enormous successes in the achievement of purely material prosperity democracy failed to realize its religious potentialities, he was prepared to turn his back on it. "It is as if someone had given us an enormous body and a small soul or none at all," he wrote in such a moment. The tremendous struggle of workers for better wages left him indifferent: their meetings, parties, proclamations, and strikes were not mirrored in his book. "According to you, dear friend," he wrote in one of his manifestoes, "democracy is achieved if there are elections, politics, various party slogans, and nothing else. As for myself, I believe that the present role of democracy begins only when she goes farther and farther. . . . Her real and permanent grandeur is her religion; otherwise she has no grandeur."

Just as the people contain all, assimilating all nations, climates, ages, points of view, natures, religions, so the democratic bard rejects nothing and no one in the world:

I left no one at the door, I invited all;

The thief, the parasite, the mistress—these above all I called—

I invited the slave with flabby lips

And invited the syphilitic!

In former ages no one ever dreamed of such mindless expansiveness. "I am both white and black, and belong to every caste—mine is every faith—I am a farmer, gentleman, mechanic, artist, sailor, Quaker, criminal, visionary, brawler, lawyer, priest, and physician. . . ." This sense of one's multiplicity, this identification

with everyone—here we have the first great expression of the personality of the democratic bard.

He never forgot, even for a moment, that around him were myriads of worlds and behind him were myriads of centuries. In each drop he saw the ocean; in each second he sensed eternity. Nothing petty, nothing small! He had a soul like a telescope: he knew only the far and the wide. “I am only a period, only an atom in the floating desert of the world”—such was his inexhaustible sense of things.

I have flowers in my hat—the resurrection of thousands of ages.

He did not see the flowers themselves or note their petals, their curls—rather, he saw, sensitively, the immensity and boundlessness that are joined to them. It is not insignificant that one so often finds the words millions, trillions, billions in his poetry.

Trillions of springs and winters have we already spent, but we still have trillions and trillions more in reserve. . . . We have millions of suns in reserve.

This minute reaches me after a billion others. It is not better than any other.

Millions—and one is measured out for him.

He seemed all his life to be moving among interplanetary spaces, indifferent to our centimeters and inches! “Whirling worlds carried my cradle as they turned; the very stars gave me their places.” Up to this time world poetry had not known such a cosmic, grandiose spirit. Literature had had its poet-titans, poet-giants, to be sure, but their cosmos was small and toylike. Dante undoubtedly knew the address of Lucifer and Christ and could show you a map of hell and heaven. Would it have been possible for him to get drunk in spaces and distances which he did not know or experience? A new cosmos enriched man’s knowledge, and here, in Whitman, we have the first great poet of the new cosmos.

Doesn’t it seem likely that science has stirred this hitherto unknown and cosmic breadth of feeling in the contemporary spirit? Despite the limitless surge of democracy, truly a new and universal flood, one cannot see it as arousing in the contemporary spirit so grand a sense of boundlessness, expanse, immensity!

“Only think,” writes the poet, “only imagine yourself as the present United States, these 38 or 40 states, joined together as one, these sixty or seventy million equal, identical people, imagine their

similar lives, similar passions, similar destinies—these numerous contemporary crowds, which bubble up, seethe around us, and of which we are inseparable parts! And think how limited and narrow was the profession of earlier poets, however much they may have been geniuses. Well, up to our epoch they did not know, they did not see the multiplicity, the seething, the beat of life; similarly, the cosmic and dynamic poetry of the people, which now arouses everyone's spirit, was not important up to now."

A million identical hearts transport him into ecstasy, into delirium. He does not know a higher rapture than to plunge into that ocean of humanity, to sink into it, merge with it. . . . But the equality of everyone, the world fellowship of people, is not enough for his generous, ample spirit. He wants the trees and the stars and every little blade of grass and grain of sand to be drawn into the democratic fold, the whole universe transformed into a democracy!

There is neither better nor worse—no hierarchy!—all things, all acts, all feelings are equal and right, and a cow, dully chewing her cud, is as beautiful as the Venus of Melos; and a small leaf of grass is no less than the ways of the sky's planets; and to see a pod of peas transcends the wisdom of the ages; and the soul is not more than the body, and the body not more than the soul; and one may pray to the bug and to manure: they are as worthy of prayer as the very holiest of holies. Everything is divine and everything is equal:

I'm glad for all the weeds that grow; I'm ready to water them!

Or do you say that the laws of the universe are wrong and must be changed?

A frog is a masterpiece; there can be none greater! And a mouse is a miracle which can stagger sextillions of infidels!

I do not call the turtle evil because it is only a turtle.

Because you are greasy or pimpled, or were once drunk, or a thief,
Or that you are diseas'd, or rheumatic, or a prostitute,
Or from frivolity or impotence, or that you are no scholar and
never saw your name in print,
Do you give in that you are any less immortal?

Life is as beautiful as death; honor as good as dishonor. Victory and defeat are one. "Have you heard that it is good to win and to conquer? I tell you that defeat is good too! It is all the same: to destroy or to be destroyed!"

Universal equality, identity! And science, toward which every microbe and vibrio contributes as much as the greatest among us in this universal life, and according to which the metals and gases under my feet are the same as those on the farthest suns, and even the erratic comet moves by the same laws as the ball of a playing girl—science strengthens, broadens the contemporary spirit's democratic feeling of equality.

For the poet it has come to this, that he speaks for whatever he sees: and this is I!—and here we have no scheme, no formula, but the living human sensibility. He feels in every nerve his equality with everything and everyone. . . .

“I do not ask the wounded about wounds; I put myself in his place!” He dreams of inspiring us with this sense of equality, identity, for without it what can democracy be? It intoxicates him to swooning, to hallucination, to trance. Like a possessed fakir in some bacchic inspiration, he chokes and shouts that even the stars are he, and God is he; and his doubles are everywhere, and the whole world is an extension of himself: “All of me can't be contained between my boots and hat!”

The Niagara waterfall is a veil across my face!

My elbows are in the ocean depths, and with the palms of my hands I cover the whole earth!

Oh, I began to rave about myself, but there are so *many selves!*”

And for him there is no barrier either in time or space: sitting in a Washington street-car, he, a Yankee, can stride along through the old hills of Judea side by side with the young, handsome Christ. . . .

And so, discovering in his generous and broad spirit the full development of a sensibility which is only faintly dawning among us, which almost does not exist, and for which everything is yet to come—a sense of equality and union with all things—he throws himself impetuously at each object, embracing it, stroking it (for each is related to him!), and immediately rushes to another in order that he may caress it too: for this one is beautiful too, just like that one—and he heaps, piles up on his chaotic pages mounds, pyramids, thousands of the most different forms, endless lists, itemizations of everything, of whatever flashes before him, inventories, catalogues, price lists (as his enemies said, laughing), believing, in his enthusiasm, that he had only to name these crowding visions without

embellishment and they would be invoked, they would of themselves inevitably inspire poetry, beauty, a burning of the soul, and indeed many of his catalogues are more inspired than many sweetly conventional poems:

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,
(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's
bed-room). . . .

The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail. . . .

The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds
it off in a ball, and stops now and then for the knots. . . .

The reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign
painter is lettering with blue and gold. . . .

The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy
and pimpled neck,

The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink
to each other. . . .

The floor-men are laying the floor, the tinners are tinning the
roof, the masons are calling for mortar. . . .

Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower
mows, and the winter-grain falls in the ground. . . .

Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-
grandsons around them,

In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after
their day's sport,

The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps
by his wife,

And these tend inward to me and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

I have translated his grandiose verse word for word, on the same scale and in the same rhythms as the original; I found no meter and no sweet proportion there.

"I have no amorous stanzas for women with stomach aches! Away with the sweetness of meter!" shouted the American bard—and spent several years cutting out of his work all the effects and embellishments of ordinary verse, seeing them as servants of a dead feudal culture, the heritage of an aristocratic world,

"We have in America such mad storms, such mighty men, such tremendous events; we have the largest oceans, the highest mountains, limitless prairies—how, then, can we tolerate these soft, pretty dolls, made with flabby fingers! . . ." he said of American letters. "The awakening of the people and the destruction of social barriers served as a call to contemporary poetry, and unconsciously I answered it."

In the name of democracy he rejected the heroes of the old balladry, all former themes, the old esthetic:

"Muse, migrate from Greece, give up Ionia, the stories of Troy; stop singing of Achilles' wrath, of the wanderings of Odysseus and Aeneas! Affix this placard on Parnassus: *Removed. To Let.*

"My purpose is to invest the gray masses of America with that shining greatness and heroism with which the Greek and feudal poets invested their gods and heroes."

Traditional poetry was nailed up in a coffin. "The locomotive has its own rhythm, the streets of Chicago resound differently from the ancient pastures of Arcadia." Whitman regarded himself as the greatest reformer of versification, "the Richard Wagner of poetry," and it is indeed remarkable that the finest esthetes, traditionalists, guardians of classic canons now speak enthusiastically of his daring rebellion against standards of traditional beauty.

* * * * *

But I fear that the singer of the gray multitude, among whom everyone is equal, among whom all are as one and one as all, does not see or distinguish *separate* human beings.

If he regards Hamlet as identical with Chichikov and Shakespeare as Smerdyakov's twin, then we are dealing not with Shakespeare or Hamlet or personalities but with some sort of statistics or algebra that is both horrible and oppressive.

If the poetry of the future is to be found in this depersonalized personality, then I do not want either poetry or the future!

I would not give up even the nose of Cyrano de Bergerac, the famous fundamental nose without which Bergerac is not Bergerac, or even the hunchback of Quasimodo, or the scent of Petrouchka, for these are distinguishing traits—and I find it painful to read poems dedicated to the First Met.

"I celebrate each one and everyone and love anyone!" the poet reiterates continually, and he does not look at the person whom he celebrates. Why should he look, if everyone is alike? The First Met, some depersonalized personality, is the new Aeneas, the Ulysses of

the future democratic epoch, and all we know about him is that he is like a million others. . . . But no, he is not a single person:

He is not alone!

He is the father of those who themselves become fathers!

A many-peopled kingdom flourishes inside him, proud, rich republics,

And do you know who stems from the descendants of his descendants?

And the woman whom he praises is a general woman, everybody's woman, and not this one or that one, marked by a mole, who has the most distinctive and peculiar gait in the world. He sees her as a productive womb, but does not sense the fascination of her personality.

“I pour myself into you!” he declares to his lovers: “For thousands and thousands of years I shall be incarnated through you!” We hear of thousands more, of ages and ages as yet unknown; will Juliet or even the latest “doll” consent to serve her Romeo for all these nameless, incarnate centuries?

When you love—how powerfully, how keenly, you sense the individuality of the loved one, her singularity, her “inequality with anyone”:

This hair-line running to the left
Is the only one in the world;
This childish, wistful glance
Is singular and best.

But can one discern anything *singular* in these crowds, legions, billions of the loving, compassionate poet? Here he is blind, and hopelessly blind. “Out of the ocean of humanity, out of the roaring sea a droplet splashed and whispered: I love you”—this is his experience of love.

From the world turn to the ocean, my love;
I, too, am but a drop in the ocean. . . .

And, characteristically, when he wished to mourn the death of President Lincoln, he mourned for all those who are dead, for every death, and the personality of the great warrior found no place at all in his majestic poem. He is the wholesale poet of the herd! And the enemies of democracy exult: what else can one expect of poets of the crowd, of the commonplace and the ordinary!

“O divine average! O divine banality, platitude!” he shouts defiantly, and because of his scorn for individuality many are led

to speculate as to the failure and bankruptcy of democratic taste.

Now these many, happily enough, are in error, and I am as wrong as they are. The poetry of democracy is especially the poetry of personality! Never before has personality been expressed so impetuously, so enchantingly, as in this bard of the gray, undistinguished mass! And the first personality that he celebrates is himself:

I celebrate myself, I sing myself!

I am divine both inside and outside; I look into a mirror, and I see God before me (even though the mirror reveals a disheveled man, without a neck-tie, with a swollen neck).

Isn't this the revolt of personality, unbridled, satanic, Promethean? The poet falls before the mirror and kisses his reflection as the image of God.

I too work wonders.

I am not the enemy of revelation and the Bible: the smallest hair on my hands is a revelation and a Bible.

He is ready to build himself a shrine and perform his own liturgy and cry out on every side that all the universe is one and that he is the center of all world-views: "It is for me, earth, that you have set forth these flowering apple trees which now perfume the air"

Ascending sun, blindingly bright, how soon you would have destroyed me,

If the sun inside me had not ascended to meet you!

He has bought up all the gods, they are in his pocket, and on every altar before which people worship he sits sacrilegiously in order to banter with the gray, equal multitude which he has just sanctified. . . . He is not false to them; he does not betray.

You are side by side with me on the throne—we are one, whoever you are, and if you glance into the mirror you, too, will see God there."

Now what if one sees mean little eyes in the mirror, the face of a syphilitic, a hangman, or an idiot? Is this indeed God? It is! Psalms and exaltation are due to the most abominable among us! Odes! Hymns!

You do not know of yourself how great you are!

Oh, I do not celebrate anyone in my poems, not even God, if I do not celebrate you!

No one has so fine a gift that you do not possess it too, or such beauty, or such goodness as you already have!

"These measureless prairies! These boundless rivers! You are measureless and boundless like them!" he assures everyone: the first met, the idiot, the hangman, the syphilitic. And soon not a single human being is left on earth: all have been transformed into gods. The old ikon painters placed a golden crown on one Head and left all others dark and uncrowned; on the poet's ikonostasis there are numberless crowds of heads, and each has a golden halo. The former God-man has been replaced with a throng of man-gods; they swarm on the street, in the stores, on the Exchange, and each of them is a messiah, each has come from heaven to work miracles, and each is himself a wonder incarnate. In this, then, lies the triumph of democracy, that she considers every man Unique, that she not only does not scorn personality but, indeed, brings it out and sanctifies it. The wails of the fearful have been meaningless:

Huns! Vandals! Save yourselves, those who can: run. They are crushing, destroying us!

Well, the Huns came, and they not only failed to crush anyone, but—according to their poet—they said to all: you are divine. It is precisely for that reason that the poet joins Derzhimord, Schiller, Smerdyakov, and Hamlet under the same crown: he senses, he plainly sees, that at the root, in their mystic essence—under deceptive covers—their souls are equal, alike, similarly divine, immortal, and beautiful; and he denies that the envelope of the soul distinguishes Smerdyakov from Schiller. Remove the shell, the husk, dispel the mirage, and only then will you see their authentic, eternal personalities. Only then will you realize that the famous nose of Bergerac and the scent of Petrouchka and the mole of Karamazov's Grushenka and the genius of great men and the vulgarity of the vulgar are not aspects of personality, the expression of personality, but masks behind which it hides. Our individuality begins where our particular traits end, and through checkered and many-imaged veils the poet sees everyone's unique soul:

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet
and hands,
Even now your features, joys, speech, house, trade, manners,
troubles, follies, costume, crimes, dissipate away from you,
Your true soul and body appear before me,

They stand forth out of affairs, out of commerce, shops, work, farms, clothes, the house, buying, selling, eating, drinking, suffering, dying. . . .

The mockeries are not you,
Underneath them and within them I see you lurk,
I pursue you where none else has pursued you.

In these magnificent words the poet gives us the eternal, granite basis for the development of democratic equality: a belief in the mystic essence of man's immortal ego—so that democracy might “with flower, fruit, radiance, and divinity achieve true humanity” and strengthen the new religion of universal divinity.

Democracy has given mankind a new word: comrade. The sense that we are the soldiery of some Great Army which goes from victory to victory without Napoleons and marshals has sprouted in the people who fill the public squares, theaters, banks, universities, restaurants, cinemas, street-cars of today's teeming cities.

Now this wonderful sense which, as we know, the poet felt so strongly that it drew him to the wounded and dying in hospitals, wards for infectious diseases, fields washed by blood—this sense has not yet found full expression in contemporary poetry. The chivalrous adoration of woman, proper to the Middle Ages, the cult of the Beautiful Lady which ennobled sexual love and achieved social refinement, is now insufficient: the future of humanity needs a cult, too—the cult of the comrade, the cult of democratic union, for a new tenderness suffuses the hearts of men, a love of the fellow warrior, co-worker, fellow traveler, of him who journeys with us shoulder to shoulder and takes part in the general movement; it is this still weak feeling, this embryo or beginning of feeling, that the poet strengthened in his gigantic soul, brought to flame, to passion, to that all-encompassing, grand emotion with which, as he believed, he transfigured himself in a vision of the world triumph of democracy.

He anticipated the future even in this. And if today his odes to comrades, to those whom he called *camerado*, seem unreal, strange, and remind one of serenades to a lover—they are excessively pleading and flamingly affectionate—that is so because the days have not yet come when our hearts, too, can flame with such magnificent passion.

There is a whole anthology of these strange love poems in his book.

Words have not yet been found for such a feeling. The formal word *comradeship* does not express it. This is a burning, stormy, almost alarming love of man for man, and without it, as the poet believed, democracy is only a shadow, an illusion.

"These lovers will have full freedom, these comrades will have full equality. Or do you ask that some public official join you as comrades? Or do you wish some sort of agreement on paper? Or force? No, no one in the whole world or in the universe can bind you so."

Now it is clear why the fratricide and bloodshed of Europe drew this request from the bard:

I'd like a poem from over the sea:

You, heart of free hearts!

More than all contemporary poets he is the singer of joy, the hopeful messenger of future happiness; and what do we tired, impoverished, degenerate souls need today if not this new gospel of universal divinity, universal beauty, and universal happiness?

Poet of American Democracy*

By D. Mirsky

Translated by Samuel Putnam

I

Walt Whitman is the last great poet of the bourgeois era of humanity, the last in the line that begins with Dante. Just as the appearance of Dante marked the birth of a new, freer, more progressive age in that country which was the first to start breaking from its feudal prison, so did Whitman's appearance in the youngest of the great capitalistic nations mark the latest historic moment at which it was possible still to believe in the triumph of bourgeois ideals of humankind and, strong in such a faith, to discover the soil for a great poetry.

[Several paragraphs of Marxist interpretation of American political history omitted here.]

*Introduction to Kornei I. Chukovsky's Russian translation of *Leaves of Grass*, 9th ed., 1935 (see Bibliography). An awkward translation was published in *Dialectics*, New York, 1937. The late Samuel Putnam, distinguished translator from several languages, made a more literary translation especially for the present volume.

II

Whitman is the poet of American democracy of the Fifties and Sixties, in all of its organic strength. He gives poetic voice to democracy's illusion that a new humanity has already been born, one that has but to grow and develop normally; his is the highest expression that we have of such illusions. But with all of his genius, he bears the indelible brand of that democracy's anti-revolutionary and provincial character.

The individual quality of Whitman's poetry derives in good part from the strange and even weird combination that we find in it of originality and inspired daring, in a choice of themes never before treated by poets, with a provincial naiveté that is utterly incapable of beholding itself through the eyes of others. Out of this provincialism comes a break with the culture of the past and the poet's obstinate depiction of himself as prophet and preacher. Such a provincialism, obviously tinged by and akin to religious sectarianism, enabled Whitman to build up out of the illusions of American democracy a system which to him presented the same appearance as had that historic order which was based upon the religions of the past. If on the one hand Whitman is a brother spirit to Dante and Goethe, his other affinities would include such individuals as Brigham Young, leader of the Mormon sect, and the founder of "Christian Science," Mrs. Eddy.

Being a systematization of far-flung illusions, pointing to a luminous future to be evolved out of a present that was bubbling with life and energy, Whitman's ideology was a reasoned admixture of materialistic and mystical elements. Taking an environment that was ready at hand, in the fulness of its sweep and scope, with all of its material and practical implications, as a high and authentic reality, Whitman was unable to grasp that reality in its true revolutionary unfoldment. His optimism was not based upon a correct and active comprehension of what lay wrapped up in all this energy, and so, had need of a "higher" strength by way of support. While his point of departure was materialism, he could not avoid falling back upon mystic pantheism. He felt the need of an imminent god, the "soul" of matter. This soul was in the nature of a pledge, to the effect that all was making for a brighter future, that all was right with the world and moving in a necessary direction, one that would assure a better order of things. Whitman's mystical pantheism was an expression not alone of that illusory character of his ideals, but

of their anti-revolutionary character as well. Animate nature might be left to see to the progress of her off-spring.

At the same time, however, it is Whitman's democratic pantheism, which underlying that cult of the common man, constitutes the fundamental pathos of his poetry. In his pantheism, he is not highly original, nor does he stand alone among democratic (and pseudo-democratic) ideologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Optimistic in outlook this pantheism is sharply inimical to the old dogmatic religions; but it is nonetheless definitely religious in mental attitude and definitely mystical in world-view; in substance, it is above all a popularization of the philosophy of bourgeois democracy. The kernel is from the contemplative Rousseau, while Hugo, in his historiosophic poems, supplies an embodiment which in poetic strength is second only to Whitman's own. A plain traveller, this, in that stream of petty bourgeois thought that gravitates toward socialism, one which, in our own time, was to be given a notably vulgarized, though for a wide circle of the petty bourgeoisie, an extremely effective expression in the *Saint Joan* of Bernard Shaw.

The mystical basis of Whitman's system will be found set forth with the utmost clarity in the fifth section of the poem, "Walt Whitman," in a language which is quite familiar to all who possess an acquaintance with the "classics" of mysticism.

Whitman's mysticism, however, was not uprooted from materialism; just as democratic illusions regarding the future still had their roots in the reality of present-day democracy. It was a spontaneous, idealistic outgrowth of materialistic premises that were true enough, even as the illusions were swift-growing, optimistic off-shoot of real conditions. Whitman very definitely extols science and that knowledge of the world which it affords. But science was not sufficient. In addition to it, there must be a "higher knowledge": in the Foreword to the edition of 1876, he wrote:

Only (for me, at any rate, in all my prose and poetry) joyfully accepting modern science, and loyally following it without the slightest hesitation, there remains ever recognized still a higher flight, a higher fact, the eternal soul of man (of all else too) the spiritual, the religious . . .

One can no more shut his eyes to the anti-revolutionary character of Whitman's ideology than one can to his mysticism. His position in American democracy was not on the extreme Left. If a man like John Brown, striving with a handful of companions to stage a slave uprising, is an exceptional and well-nigh solitary figure, the Whitman of before the war stands definitely apart, not only from a

John Brown, but from the abolition movement of the world, which was fighting to do away with slavery by legal means.

Whitman's democracy, organically and in deepest essence, was nationalistic. Democracy for him was something specifically American. He accepted it as something already existent in the nature of the American people and needing only to be brought to light. At the beginning, he believed—as a present-day prophet—that the publication of *Leaves of Grass* would be the signal for the discovery of a true democracy. Later on, in the Seventies, he had to confess that America of the present was yet far from the ideal; but all the same, he continued to assert that

... the morbid facts of American politics and society everywhere are but passing incidents and flanges of our unbounded impetus of growth . . . weeds, annuals, of the rank, rich soil—not central, enduring, perennial things . . .

At the same time, he had learned that

... the true growth-characteristic of the democracy of the New World are henceforth to radiate in superior literary, artistic and religious expressions, far more than in its republican forms, universal suffrage and frequent elections. . . .

Thus it was, Whitman was led to that assertion of the inferiority of politics, its lack of worth as compared to "higher values," which is to be met with in Shelley, and which is so characteristic for the whole of non-democratic humanism. His historic world-view will be found expressed, in extremely concise form, in the following verses, bearing the curious sub-title, "After Reading Hegel" (the title is "Roaming in Thought"):

Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is
Good steadily hastening toward immortality,
And the vast all that is call'd Evil I saw hastening to merge itself
and become lost and dead.

In America, the "little that is Good" was already at work and might be left to complete its task to the fullest extent. As for other peoples, Whitman, like American democracy as a whole, sympathized with them in their struggle with kings and feudal barons. He occasionally sings the praises of the French Revolution, and he extends greetings to the émigré rebel of 1848 (for Whitman, "The 72d and 73d Years of These States"). But his sympathy is purely a passive one, and the class war never comes within the range of Whitman's themes. If the Southern slaveholders were his enemies, it was not because they were slaveholders, but for the reason that they had wanted to cease being Americans.

Human brotherhood meant for Whitman, depending upon the direction it took, two very different things. In the one case, it was something wholly concrete and related to life, an emotional brotherhood with the "mass" of "average" Americans round about him. In the other case, it was a pantheistic feeling of fraternal sympathy with each and every human being, and—what is more—with every living creature and with all matter. This latter sentiment is thoroughly passive, and is unaccompanied by any arduous desire to struggle for a real, democratic brotherhood of peoples. It is measurably nearer to Christian brotherhood than it is to a communistic solidarity of workers. If there was in Whitman, in relation to his brother Americans, an active "love of comrades," one that is given an inspired lyric expression in his verse and a practical application in his hospital work during the years 1861-65, his feeling of brotherhood, on the other hand, toward mankind in general, toward men of another race or class than his own (*e.g.* the slave), was no more than a "survival," no more than an "inner experience." He is conscious of a fraternal, pantheistic identity with the fugitive slave; indeed, he migrates into the slave's body and soul ("Song of Myself," section 33); and the verses he has given us on this subject are among the strongest that we have from his pen.¹ Yet, earlier in this same poem (section 16), speaking of his sense of universal identity, he is equally one with the slaveholder:

A southerner soon as a northerner—a planter nonchalant and hospitable; down by the Oconee I live.

In his no less inspired "I Sing the Body Electric," he speaks thus of the sale of a slave at auction:

A man's body at auction;
I help the auctioneer—the sloven does not half know his business.
Gentlemen, look on this wonder!
Whatever the bids of the bidders, they cannot be high enough
for it. . .

Back of man's vileness and degradation, Whitman beholds his native grandeur, but in such a manner that the vileness and degradation is skimmed off, as an inferior and unauthentic reality, and so, ceasing to exist, is no longer an occasion for struggle. This is precisely the path followed by Christian thought, which announces that "there is neither slave nor free man, Greek nor Jew, but that all are children of the heavenly father and the partakers of his glory."

It is not possible to disavow or gloss over these aspects of Whitman's as being the inconsistencies and contradictions of an insufficiently thought out system of reasoning. For Whitman's ideology is fully thought out and rounded. Its contradictions are the organic and unavoidable ones to be found in all bourgeois thinking. It is one that is still held, in the full force of its implications, by all social idealists and left-revolutionists. We are, accordingly, obliged to adopt a critical attitude toward it. For it would be a gross distortion to attempt to cover over its anti-revolutionary and mystical aspects, and to behold in Whitman a seer with the brain of a proletarian revolutionist, looking forward to a classless society of the future. If his ideology is a democratic one, his brand of democracy is thoroughly bourgeois.

However, we do not judge writers and thinkers of the past by their ideologies, nor by that element of the ephemeral and the nationalistic which is inevitably to be met with in each of them; we judge them rather by what is progressive and enduring in their work.² This progressive and enduring element in the case of Whitman is his poetry.

III

The basis of Whitman's art lies in a vanquishing of Romanticism upon its own ground, that of "exalted" poetry. Arising out of a protest against the realistic path taken by the French Revolution and by capitalism in its development, Romanticism affirmed a break between knowledge and the ideal. Leading poetry out of the concrete real of today, it proceeded to confer upon it a heavenly-incorporeal or retrospective character. This attitude was a widespread one; it is to be found not merely in a few Romanticists, but throughout the whole of nineteenth century poetry in Europe. The contemporary scene—political, economic, and technological—might make its way into the poet's pages only when symbolically transmuted, only when triggered out in a more or less precapitalistic garb. Even where, as in *Faust*, poetry was an expression of underlying forces at work in the present, its gaze was turned aside from the element of concrete falsity inherent in those forces. Only in the field of satire did it remain realistic in style, preserving a bond of union with the prose of the literary realists. In Russia, Whitman's contemporary, Nekrasov, was at work here, broadening the scope of satire and creating a new poetry. But satire as a whole was looked down upon, as being of a lower order; and even when they sympathized with its ideas, Nekrasov's countrymen deemed his work of

little value from the poetic point of view, holding it to be nothing more than "prose in verse." This orientation of poetry in the direction of realistic prose was marked by a repudiation of the great philosophic themes dealt with by bards of a more exalted kind, and by an abandonment of free lyricism.

In this orientation lay, too, an avowal of the triumph of prose over poetry, of the poet's subdual by capitalistic reality. *Don Juan* and *Germania* were not capitulations to a "century hostile to poetry"; they represented a forced understanding to the effect that the century in question was to be combatted on its own field, that of prose.

Whitman, breaking sharply with all nineteenth century poetry, brought a new affirmation of reality, by creating a lofty, lyric interpretation of the present. This it is which is basic and central in his work, rendering it a forerunner of the poetry of socialism. And this affirmation, needless to say, is inseparably bound up with the poet's democratic illusions, with his system of thought. These twin phases of Whitman are wholly different in value. His system provided a logically complete, abstract generalization of environing reality and that future which was reared upon it. His poetry afforded a true and concrete reflection of that same reality. The system put a false estimate upon the internal tendencies of bourgeois democracy. The poems laid bare in the bourgeois-democratic consciousness that humanity which could come to full bloom only under socialism. And that which was false when given an abstract-theoretic generalization thanks to the saving concreteness of art was left standing as a truth.

That reality which Whitman affirmed was a bourgeois reality. But in his affirmation, the poet stressed not that which was essentially bourgeois, but that which was creative and progressive. This spark of the creatively progressive was one that he fanned and nursed; and if in his system the result was a crude distortion of perspectives, in his poetry the same impulse went to enrich a hyperbolism that is legitimately and organically present in the domain of science.

Whitman keeps telling us, over and over again, that "I celebrate myself." One of his bold and original "sorties" is the calling of himself by his full name in the course of a sustained lyric poem ("Song of Myself"). But in essence, Whitman is as genuine a specimen as any that there is of the impersonal type of poet; the poet in this case is no "lyric hero"; he is without lyric biography; he but gives "choric" expression to feelings and ideas that are not de-

pendent upon any personal destiny. Another especially good example of such a poet in modern times is Schiller; but in contrast to him, Whitman stands out brilliantly by reason of his originality and his innovations. The contemporary scene enters into Schiller's poetry only after it has been abstractly purged of its concrete aspect. In Whitman's it is all there, with all of its everyday, prosaic topicality, in all its grime and mire. It is lifted and generalized into poetry, not through any process of abstraction or catharsis, but by means of a symbolic expansion, predicating the importance of the discovery of types and their significance in the scene's lowest and most trivial elements.

Whitman's poetry is profoundly realistic. And like all enduring art of the kind, it is based upon a disclosure of the typical in the individual. Whitman's realism, however, does not consist in an unfoldment of plots and characters such as we know from our reading of the classic realities in the form of the novel.

This is a realism that is achieved by separate strokes, with subjects and incidents neither described nor depicted, but simply and swiftly listed, listed with a definitive concreteness. From the conjunction of these strokes springs Whitman's essential, generalized poetic form—which is, at the same time, that of American democracy.

The quality of Whitman's verse is very uneven. When the poet loses his realistic concreteness, it degenerates into a noisy rhetoric, crude and monotonous in rhythm and yet cruder and more monotonous in its tone, which is like a prolonged, continuous shout. Here belong many declamatory lines which come not so much from the poet as from the prophet and system-builder. Under this head are those verses where Whitman, striving to remain concrete, is led to speak of things that he knows nothing about, inasmuch as they exceed the bounds of his American horizon. Such clumsily rhetorical passages are sometimes redeemed by their unconscious humor. This, for example, may be said to be true of the celebrated poem, "Salut au Monde," constructed in accordance with his favorite method, that of cataloguing. Whitman's provincialism and lack of cultural background are here evidenced in a fortuitous piling up of appellations for objects and incidents taken from a popular geography and compelled to yield a grandiose and vulgarized picture of present-day humanity in the bulk.

The core of Whitman's work, its rock-bottom, so to speak, will bear comparison with the best poetry that the world has produced.

One may mention here such poems as "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," "The Sleepers," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of the Broad-Axe," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "Pioneers! O Pioneers," "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd" (on the death of President Lincoln), and a whole series of shorter poems, including one so notable for its lyric qualities as "Tears" (from the group, "Sea-Drift"), and "Drum-Taps," which is almost a whole collection dealing with the Civil War, 1860-66. All the pieces mentioned belong to the Fifties and Sixties, which witnessed the simultaneous dawn of American democracy and of democracy's great poet. In 1873, Whitman suffered a paralytic stroke, which definitely shattered his health. This coincided with America's rapid capitalistic decline and the crushing of that objective optimism which had marked the preceding decades. It was in this period of depression that Whitman's work made its appearance. The last two decades of his life added little to the substance of that work, although those years do include so surprising a poem as "The Dalliance of the Eagles," which contains, it may be, the concentrated essence of his genius, of all that he wrote.

The "Walt Whitman" whom Whitman "celebrated" was not an individual endowed with a definite biography, a definite personality differentiating him from others; he was a metonymical type, the average man, the average American, bringing from out the American masses the sum and substance of the contemporary scene. The individuality that Whitman hymns is crystallized with precision in the opening lines of the first poem (first in the final group) of his collected verse, "One's Self I Sing." This untranslatable blending of an impersonal "one" with a recurring "self" might be rendered as "the self of everyman," or "everyman's self"; it has a light to throw upon bourgeois democracy, and upon democracy's poet.

The pathos of Whitman's poetry is the pathos of union, equality, human dignity and progress. The artistic expression of these themes in verse is not to be identified with their theoretic development in the ideologic system; the former is not to be viewed in the light of the latter. In thinking out, intellectually, the subjects that he took for his verse, Whitman was led to abandon a poetic concreteness of imagery for a false and one-sided process of abstract generalization which comes as a break in the true pathos of his work. It is Whitman the prophet acting as self-interpreter for Whitman the poet. Inasmuch as it is difficult to demarcate one from the

other with exactitude, we should proceed from the premise that the prophet's interpretations not only are not binding upon us, but that they actually interfere with a proper understanding of the poet.

Thus, in connection with the theme of unity, there is no need for us to accept, naively and unquestioningly, the "prophetic" explanation of it, as pantheism. The sentiment of unity with respect to the nation, humanity, the world order is in Whitman a direct lyric expansion of the vital sympathy he felt for the democratic masses. It receives an incarnation in the form of a feeling for the political unity of "These States," as expressed in the war poems, in a concrete feeling of brotherhood with the American who is one of the people—in the theme of "comradeship," as democracy's basic cement. As for the theme of unity as a common link embracing all humanity, while it is given a glowing expression in certain isolated instances (the fugitive slave in "Song of Myself," the episode of the mother and the Indian squaw in "The Sleepers"), it is in general set forth in verses that are abstract rather than realistic. But at the other pole, the theme unfolds in an opulent lyric bloom, in the form of verses on the oneness of nature, the sea and the universe. This motive, indeed, that of a union with material nature, is accorded in Whitman a simpler, more direct and immediately lyric treatment than in any other poet of modern times.

The idea of an actual union with the whole of things attains a highly original peak in the theme of death. In the Whitmanic acceptance, death is a "cool" and happy fusion with the material universe, a conception in which there is no room for weariness or decay. It is a thoroughly optimistic feeling, this, and one that springs from an animating sense of identity of direction, the feeling that each man is traveling a path along which others will continue after him—the classic sense of succession and survival. Nor is it strange if the theme in question stands out with especial clarity in the notable poem written on the death of Abraham Lincoln, leader and hero of American democracy, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd" (in particular, the song of the hermit thrush).

The theme of equality, likewise, enters into Whitman's poetry, as one of its organic and organizing constituents. This it is which at bottom explains the poet's passion for bestowing an exalted lyric treatment upon everything which up to his time had been looked upon as vile and "unworthy of the Muse." Closely related to this are Whitman's realistic innovations and his cataloguing, a method of which he is so fond. With him, the sentiment of equality is espe-

cially directed against unilateral affirmation of the "spiritual" man at the expense of the flesh-and-blood being. This theme comes, accordingly, to be closely interwoven with the exaltation of the body, which lends itself to the development of another, broader motive, the forceful revelation and assertion of human dignity. One of the nodal passages in all Whitman's poetry is the famous ninth section of "I Sing the Body Electric," where he applies his inventory method to the parts of the body, from the head to the lower organs, all the way down to the heels, by way of affirming their equal worth with the human consciousness or "soul."

In this dignifying of humankind through the human body, Whitman aligns himself with the followers of Saint-Simon, bent upon a "rehabilitation of the flesh." But in working out the idea poetically, Whitman displays a maximum of originality. The rehabilitation of the flesh, as a counterpoise to Christian repression, had already been brilliantly dealt with by Goethe. Goethe, however, was unable to get along without stylization. Just as in *Faust* he had need of a Renaissance dress, so in his *Roman Elegies* and other erotic verse, he still was unable to dispense with antiquity. Like the men of the French Revolution, he felt the necessity of justifying and fortifying himself with the authority of the ancients. In essence, his eroticism comes close to the practical materialism of the Southern slaveholder. A woman for him is above all an object of enjoyment and possession. There is here, as well, a trace of that art for art's sake, an exaggerated development of which is to be seen in Théophile Gautier and—carried further yet—in Remy de Gourmont. Whitman is free at once of artiness and of stylistic tricks. Beauty to the latter is merely the complete unfoldment of man's nature, one mode of realizing human dignity to the utmost. Of the very warp and woof of Whitman's eroticism is the merging of the physical passions with a sentiment of equality and respect toward woman-kind, something that is absolutely new in world poetry, even though, ideologically speaking, the Saint-Simonians are the precursors here.³ Hung upon a lovely poetic thread in "I Sing the Body Electric," this theme is expressed with a definitive concision and in a truly inspired manner in that pearl among poems, "The Dalliance of the Eagles."

And then, finally, there is Whitman's fourth theme, that of the inorganic possibilities unfolding to man's view through a conquest of nature, the theme of democratic expansion and democratic construction, the principal embodiment of which is to be found in the

"Song of the Broad-Axe" and in "Pioneers! O Pioneers" (1856 and 1865, respectively).

One cannot but be struck by the parallel between this motive and our own socialist construction. There are, needless to say, sharp contrasts which are equally striking. Not to speak of the fact that American democratic expansion was essentially predatory, so far as Indians and Mexicans were concerned (a circumstance of which, naturally, no notice is taken in Whitman's poetry), democratic construction, both in reality and in the pages of its bard, was an elementary, one-man affair. But for all of that, in his handling of the theme, Whitman is the undoubted forerunner of the poetry of Socialism. The chief thing that goes to make him such a harbinger is the fact that he was the first to introduce the theme of *labor* into poetry, in the form of a creative, lyric statement. Amid all his work, Whitman's poems on the subject of democratic construction come the nearest of all to the *ode* form. But these are odes of an utterly new kind.

It is not the idea of labor, not labor in general, that finds a place in Whitman's verse, but rather, labor's realistic, concrete, and technical processes. The "Song of the Broad-Axe" may be compared to Schiller's "Song of the Bells," one of the rare instances in bourgeois poetry where such processes are treated in the concrete. In the first place, Schiller singles out work as a theme for the reason that it bears, to begin with, the stamp of religious approval in this case—the labor of casting the bells; in the second place, work is here, in a special sense, pre-capitalistic, being closely associated with the guild organizations; and lastly, the work of the bell-founders is no more than an allegory, symbolizing a prudent bourgeois progress that knows how to ward off revolutions.

In place of one traditional process, Whitman takes the work of construction in all its range, all the infinite variety of its applications, processes and products. There is no allegory within. No antithesis between the construction of the material object, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the social construction of democracy. Out of isolated fragmentary images, the "Song of the Broad-Axe" is built up, an endless succession of images, metaphors, instances, fashioned out of the same stuff as constructive democracy. Inventoried with the greatest conciseness and the utmost concreteness, objects and incidents form an impressive generalized image of the whole of democratic America.⁴

Based upon the favored Whitman method, of inventory and catalogue, the poem consists of a number of successive strophes of a

cumulative intensity. Following a lyric introduction, the third section serves as a sort of index, being made up of a series of nouns (alluding to objects or actions) with their attributive definitions. This is done in such a way, creatively, that objects and actions stand out in a delimiting sharpness, as if they were parts of a poetic encyclopedia of carpentry that is to function as a symbol of democratic construction in America.

This is followed by a fresh catalogue of objects created by the broad-axe. The construction here is a parallel and again a cumulative one, ranging verbally from monosyllabic nouns like "hut" and "tent" to lengthy adjectives, and ideationally, from the same hut and tent to "Manhattan steamboats and clippers, taking the measure of all seas."

In a third movement, we have the enumeration of no end of objects having to do with the builder's trade, saturated, all of them, with a complex and elevated social content. Starting from simple terms ("factories, arsenals"), the poet goes on to build up a picture out of objects taken as points of departure for incidents replete with social meaning—

The shape of the step-ladder for the convicted and sentenced
murder, the murderer with haggard face and pinion'd arms,

* * * * *

The door whence the son left home, confident and puff'd up;
The door he enter'd again from a long and scandalous absence,
diseas'd, broken down, without innocence, without means.

This movement is rounded off with the significant and unifying "shapes" that mark the national scene—American democracy and its accompaniments.

And thus is constructed a new and unprecedented type of realistic ode, one springing out of an every day and prosaic reality and catching up the myriad artistic threads of a highly variegated American life.

On the side of form, Whitman shows himself to be a thorough-going innovator, breaking completely with an older poetry of a "feudal" Europe and Asia (and its American imitators) and building up a new poetic art from the very beginning. Assuredly, in all the history of art there is no other case of so absolute a break; we shall have to acknowledge that Whitman was a truly great innovator, the greatest that the world of poetry has known.

His innovations in form are directly derived from his novelty of content. This is a fundamental point, involving a liquidation of the dignity of the disparity between the conventional, stylized and retrospective idiom of elevated poetry and the language of the present. Whitman's language is that of the prosaic and democratic scene about him. His democratic speech, however, is of a different order from that of a Mayakovsky⁵ or—to stay within Anglo-American precincts—of a Kipling or a Vachel Lindsay. The prose idiom that Whitman employed in bringing new life to poetry was not the colloquial tongue of the street, the factory or the barracks; it was, rather, the language of printed prose, of newspapers and of popular science. Today, when American colloquial speech is at so very far a remove from that of literature, and when, at the same time, it is making such enormous gains in the literary field, the difference between Whitman's poetic vocabulary and that of his contemporaries, such as Emerson and Longfellow, is less noticeable. The truth is, Whitman avoided not only jargon and slang, but, in general, any tendency to colloquial syntax. The linguistic novelty of his poems springs from a new store of themes; the new words that we find there are for the most part the names of objects which up to his time had been held to be unpoetic.

To a considerably less degree dependent upon novelty of content is another fundamental tenet of Whitman's stylistic credo, namely, the avoidance of rhyme and metrics for the sake of rhythm and cadence. The poet's contempt for such "feudal playthings" is an immediate result of the *one-sided character* of the bond that held him to the democratic masses. Whitman gave expression to the masses, but he did not speak *for* them. He spoke in their name, but not to them. This was because he failed to realize that poetry written for the masses must first of all be easy-flowing, readily memorizable, and that therefore it must possess a rhythmic transparency of form. Now, in the English language (as in the vast majority of contemporary European tongues, including the Russian), this calls for rhyme. But Whitman—in his own eyes—was first of all a prophet. The important thing was not that the masses should memorize the words of his poems, but that they should adopt his teachings. He was writing, not songs, but books of sermons, scriptures.

To commit to memory Whitman's poetry is a difficult thing, but to appraise the artistic worth of his complex rhythms, a practiced ear will suffice. It is an obvious but not unnatural paradox that Whitman should first have been appreciated, not by the masses

from whom he came and to whom he was so close, but by cultured and fastidious readers of the study, by an Emerson in America, by Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites in England.

Whitman's poems have the general coherency of the usual "free" verse, without rhyme or meter; they display a close syntax, which does not admit of such variations as arise from a carrying-over of the thought from one stanza to another. But within these limitations, Whitman achieves a truly great variety indeed. It is true, as I have said before, that a good part of his verse is rhythmically crude and monotonous; but on his own poetic ground, he is an inspired and unsurpassed master of rhythm. At times, as he draws near to the summit of his powers, he at the same time approaches a true and spontaneous meter, as for example, in his "Pioneers! O Pioneers" or in the magnificent opening lines of "Song of the Broad-Axe," with their metallic woodsman's rhythm and where the rhyme seems to be motivated by the recurring blows of the axe.

Weapon shapely, naked, wan,
Head from the mother's bowels drawn,
Wooded flesh and metal bone, limb only one and lip only one,
Gray-blue leaf by red-heat grown, helve produced from a little
seed sown,
Resting the grass amid and upon,
To be lean'd and to lean upon.

But such approaches to rhyme and meter are comparatively rare in Whitman. However, in his commonly free and outwardly "formless" verse he exhibits no less strength and an equal variety.

His rhythm may achieve a high degree of spring-like compression and energy, as in the poem which I have mentioned once or twice already, "The Dalliance of the Eagles," and may take on a complicated flexibility and delicacy in comparison with which even Shelley's finest-spun efforts are somewhat arid-seeming, and schematic, as in these lines from "I Sing the Body Electric":

Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day.

Out of a system of prosody to which he is in principle opposed, he is able to create such admittedly incomparable pieces as the song of the thrush in "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd."

Whitman's command over the vowels and (especially) the consonants of the English language has no little to do with his rhythmic artistry as a whole, and this is something which even the most skillful translation cannot hope to bring out. Like Shakespeare, Whitman is to be appreciated in all his beauty only by those who read him in the original and whose ears are capable of catching his rhythmic vitality in English.

IV

In connection with Whitman, we are vividly reminded of what Marx had to say of the capitalistic era's hostility to poetry. Here, we have a poet of genius, bringing us a veracious, substantial, deep-rooted expression of American bourgeois democracy; yet that same democracy did not take him in. He himself, of course, was in part to blame for this, in so far as his poetic form was distinctly anti-popular. But though Whitman may have grievously erred on this question, despite the fact that he was possessed of a profound and structural acquaintance with, and understanding of, the society in which he lived, this but serves to cast into deeper relief the fact that, on all questions save that of poetry, he spoke the same language as democracy's self.

Bourgeois democracy could not accept a poetics such as his. Poetry for it meant "fine" poetry, of the sort purveyed by a Longfellow. Of great poetry, a poetry related to life, it felt no slightest need.

If the unpopularity of Whitman's poetic form was but the fruit of a thoroughly anti-poetic attitude on the part of the bourgeois-democratic masses, this was not any the less of an obstacle to its acceptance by the proletariat. A popular proletarian poet Whitman was not. Instead, he was the favorite of a sufficiently wide circle of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. His enormous growth in popularity and influence at the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was closely associated with the growth of those democratic illusions that marked the rise of imperialism.

Notwithstanding all the really new elements that he brought into poetry, it was not possible to appraise Whitman at the start of the new era. As for the history of poetry after Whitman, it is one of degeneration and decline. Verhaeren stands to Whitman in the same relation that European democracy of the imperialistic epoch does to American democracy of the Civil War years. Whitman's direct descendants—the Unanimists in France, Carl Sandburg in America, have taken above all the weaker sides of his poetry, the

rhetoric and abstraction of his worst pieces; they have carried these phases still further and have given to the Whitmanic forms yet more of an unpopular character. Whitman is for them Whitman the prophet, not Whitman the poet.

These abstract and rhetorical blemishes go to explain the place that Whitman occupies in proletarian poetry. He is integrally a part of an earlier stage of that poetry's development, when abstractions alike rule with regard to the revolution and to the cosmic process, a view of the world dependent for expression upon a rhetorical form. He was not able to open up a new poetic era in bourgeois society, for the very good reason that, in such a society, there could be no such new era. Down to this day, he does not succeed in reaching the proletariat, inasmuch as he is handed to the masses by petty bourgeois disciples who have taken from him precisely that which is of least worth.

If Whitman did not succeed in inaugurating a new era, he did create a poetry containing much that is not to be found in any of the classic bards of old, and which, without a doubt, brings him near to the proletariat and to socialist man. It was through a statement of environing reality that he did this; and if that reality, as stated by him, is a bourgeois one, he for all of that selected what was most worthwhile and progressive in it—democracy, labor, the conquest of nature. He brought to poetry a new concreteness, a new feeling for the material object, not as an owner aesthetically sensing it, but as the man who works with his hands and who has an interest in the product of his labor. He it was who created the poetry of human dignity, a practical vision of that full man whose fulness is only to be realized under socialism.

It is not as to a prophet with a system that we should come to Whitman, but as to an artist. The important thing is not his views, with their resulting false and theoretic concatenation of ideas, but rather those concrete forms to which he brought all the depth and strength of his emotion, all that he as an artist had learned from the American scene. This is the Whitman who occupies an honorable place with the great poets of the past, who have afforded us—I repeat—a vision of that full man who in reality is only able to exist as, at once the builder and the creator of constructive socialism.

Notes

¹"The point is to be stressed that Whitman was not a nationalist in practice. The European immigrant was as much a brother to him as was the "hundred per cent" Yankee.

²See Engels' letter to Schmidt, July 1, 1891.

³The erotic theme in Whitman's poetry, as developed abstractly and theoretically, attains a similar degree of distortion, serving as it does as a focus for that sexual mysticism which is typical of a new line of decadents, and of the founder of that line, who was an immediate disciple of Whitman, the theosophical "socialist," Edward Carpenter.

⁴The Woodsman's axe serves Whitman as a symbol of construction. It is to be kept in mind that, in 1855, the "iron age" was just beginning (up to that time, America, outside the central sections of large cities, had been nine-tenths rural). Democratic construction was, in fact, construction in the rural districts.

⁵Whitman's influence on Mayakovsky . . . was ideologic rather than poetic. It shows most clearly in connection with the Utopian-humanistic stage of Mayakovsky's work.

Whitman in Italy

FRENCH CRITICS FIRST brought Whitman to the attention of Italian writers. Probably Girolamo Ragusa-Moleti, a Sicilian, first discovered him in 1872 and introduced him to his friend Enrico Nencioni. In 1879 Nencioni published a critical appraisal of Whitman in a Roman literary newspaper, *Fanfulla della Domenica*. He warned the reader against the American poet's shocking crudities, but insisted that he had a primitive strength and magnetism that compensated for his violations of good taste. Nencioni continued to write about Whitman, and his enthusiasm aroused the interest of Carducci and D'Annunzio.

Ragusa-Moleti encouraged various friends to translate Whitman's poems. Among these was Luigi Gamberale, who published his first thin volume of selections, *Canti Scelti*, in 1887. A larger edition appeared in 1890, and finally a complete translation, *Foglie di erba* (*Leaves of Grass*) in 1907, which was revised in 1923. Meanwhile, in 1898 Pasquale Jannaccone published an excellent prosodic study called *La Poesia di Walt Whitman e L'Evoluzione delle Forme Ritmiche*, which still deserves to be translated into English. He found interesting parallels to Whitman's form in primitive Greek hymns. Jannaccone announced a second book on *La Poesia di Walt Whitman*, but he never completed it.

Giovanni Papini reviewed Gamberale's translation, finding it "by no means perfect, but 'decent and readable.'" In his *Four and Twenty Minds* (1923) Papini called his discovery of Whitman one of "the most important discoveries of my early youth: the discovery of poetry." He thought Italians had become over-refined and effete.

"If we would find again the poetry we have lost, we must go back a little toward barbarism—even toward savagery." He believed Whitman could teach this old country to recover its virility.

Ten years later Cesare Pavese published an essay on Whitman and his poetry that is still accepted in Italy as the most perceptive criticism of Whitman by an Italian. The rhetorical style of this essay makes it very difficult to translate but the selection included in this book will give at least some indication of Pavese's view of Whitman. It will probably strike the American reader as rather pretentious, but it contains some insights of real value.

As Fascists rose in Italy, writing about Whitman declined—except for use as propaganda. For example, in 1940 Maria Luisa Astaldi wrote (*Clienti e parassiti anglosassoni—Studi di letteratura inglese*): "The greatness of America as well as its misery can be found in all the works of Whitman: the incurable inconsistencies of this pagan and missionary people, attracted both by the quest of daily comfort and the will to power, by the glamor of dimensions and figures as well as by religious and pacifist preachings, together sensual and puritanical, that has inscribed on the dollar the pious motto: 'In God we trust.' "

But Italian interest in Whitman returned after the close of World War II. In 1950 Giulio Einaudi of Turin published a handsome edition of nearly a thousand pages containing the complete *Leaves of Grass* and selected prose translated by Enzo Giachino. This large book was dedicated to Cesare Pavese. The translation is an improvement over Gamberale's version, and Giachino's introduction and notes make this perhaps the most complete and reliable version of Whitman in a foreign language. Evidently Whitman still has a future in Italy.

Whitman*

By Giovanni Papini

Translated by Roger Asselineau

I must confess that *I*, a Tuscan, an Italian, a Latin, have not felt what poetry really means through Vergil or Dante—and still less thanks to Petrarch or Tasso, luxury poets and consequently men of letters rather than poets—but on the contrary through the childish enumerations and impassioned invocations of the kindly harvester of *Leaves of Grass*. . . .

We must inject into the dried up veins of the dilettantish, effeminate and well-scrubbed town-dwellers that we are, some of the healthy red blood of the peasants, of the mountaineers, of the divine mob. It is not enough to open the windows, as Giulio Orsini used to say. We must leave our houses, leave the cities and feel and love things directly, the most delicate as well as the most repugnant things, and express our love without paying attention to anyone, without resorting to sweetish euphemisms or metrical subtleties, without respecting too much the sacred traditions, honest conventions and stupid rules of good society. We must, to some extent, become barbarians again—toughs even—if we are to rediscover poetry.

Whitman—Poetry of Poetry Writing†

By Cesare Pavese

Translated by Roger Asselineau

Too often, it seems to me, the image of Walt Whitman which commentators have before their eyes is that of a bearded centenarian intent on contemplating a butterfly and gathering into his mild eyes the final serenity of all the joys and miseries of the universe. It may be the fault of the photograph which all the definitive editions of *Leaves of Grass* authorized by Bucke, Harned, and Traubel, his literary executors, bear on the frontispiece; or of the myth of a stately prophet, almost a thaumaturge, which his enthusiastic dis-

*First published in 1908, reprinted in *Ritratti Straniere: 1908-1921*, Florence, 1932.

†“Whitman—Poesia del far poesia,” *La Letteratura Americana e Altri Saggi*, Turin: Einaudi, 1951. Printed with permission of Giulio Einaudi editore.

ciples have created; or of his being considered as the unconscious third member of the triad Tolstoy-Hugo-Whitman which for a time obsessed all minds. Though definitively destroyed by the works mainly of English and French critics,¹ the legend of Walt Whitman as a seer, an illuminee, the founder of new religions, the image of Walt Whitman as a handsome white-bearded old man has persisted and unconsciously influences the preferences of readers—and thus the opinion is too wide-spread nowadays² that the true, the great Walt is, if not exactly the personality of the last effete sections of *Leaves of Grass* ("Sands at Seventy"; "Goodbye, My Fancy"; "Old Age Echoes"), at least the man who wrote the short pieces on friendship ("Calamus"), the vigorous and tender war-vignettes entitled "Drum-Taps" and the fugitive visions contained in "Whispers of Heavenly Death." The comparison of a white-bearded Walt Whitman with the poems of "Calamus," composed between thirty-five and forty, which vibrate with such youthful health and self-confidence, will seem strange. And it is well known that poetry is neither youth nor old age; it is simply poetry. But I am not speaking of these sections of *Leaves of Grass* precisely in this way to disparage them. I am only saying that the commentators of Whitman who tend to reduce all his works *merely* to these pages devoted to impressions or vignettes run the risk of falsifying and minimizing to no inconsiderable extent the unique originality of the poet and even ultimately the vignettes themselves. For, in this way, the poetry of mature inspiration, even though it has produced the short poems of "Calamus," has also given rise after all to something like the long Songs which constellate the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*. These should not be judged by the same standard as the effete and disconnected garrulity (the judgment is Walt Whitman's own)³ of an old age which, we may now say, was not quite Olympian.

Indeed, people frequently forget something which is quite obvious: that when the "sage of Camden" gave the definitive form to the book of his whole life in the 1881 edition—the seventh one—he was merely verifying and concluding at seventy-two years of age the results of a work which he had conceived dimly for the first time at thirty and already completed for the greater part at forty-eight in the 1867 edition—the fourth one. And what Walt Whitman's superb manhood was, that manhood during which he meditated and translated his book into actions, whoever has not understood it through his poems, may realize it by looking at the photograph which

Whitman himself, when he was not yet the "sage of Camden," placed at the beginning of the future "Song of Myself" in 1855, in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. A giant with a worker's shirt open at the neck and a thick beard; all his life is concentrated in two mysterious eyes which at times really look quite tender—I believe someone has called this photograph that of a "rowdy." But, whether we like it or not, the Walt Whitman of almost all the *Leaves of Grass* that counts, is this one—at least for those who can understand him.

In spite of the scepticism that has become widespread as the result of a legitimate reaction against the uncritical canonization of the "seer," it can be maintained with good arguments that Walt Whitman has always worked consciously, with a clear critical sense. And it is only natural, for it would be necessary otherwise to turn Walt Whitman, an earthly-minded man and a keen user of the file if ever there was one, into the antipathetic figure of an ecstatic idler into whose ears from time to time a demon whispers his songs. *The Magnificent Idler* is precisely the title of a lively biography in novel form, devoted to him by Cameron Rogers, the scholar who to date, I think, has best understood the poet, precisely because he has not attempted to dissert in a rhetorical manner about the catalogues and the vignettes, the psychic and internal rhymes, his homosexuality or his magnetism and such trifles, but has soundly recreated his man, attributing to him gestures, words, moods, which any unassuming reader can glimpse in the poems. And an idler Walt Whitman truly was in the sense in which every poet is an idler when instead of working he prefers to go for a walk, ruminating and twisting in his mind his future lines or "verses" with much fatigue and the rare joys which compensate for that fatigue. An idler [he was] as regards ordinary kinds of work, because he had other work to do which robbed him of all other interests and perhaps even of some of his sleep. But these things Valéry-Larbaud has already said and very well indeed.

Instead of this, it is important to emphasize that Walt Whitman knew what he was doing and that, when all is said and done—like every artist who achieves something, Walt Whitman ruminated, twisted, lived, *willed* his something, and that, if some of his theoretical pretensions have proved wrong or ill-founded in the long run in the light of our present age, the same thing has happened and keeps happening not only to all artists, but also to all men. And if before such a sentence as: "Isolated advantages in any rank or grace

or fortune—the direct or indirect threads of all the poetry of the past—are in my opinion distasteful to the republican genius and offer no foundation for its fitting verse,”⁴ anyone will observe that these are things which should not be said, even in jest, we can answer that it was above all by means of thoughts of this kind that Walt Whitman managed to clarify and delimit the proper “poetic matter” and that in any case, immediately after this heretical sentence, he takes pleasure in relating an anecdote he had read in his youth—which anecdote will also show how in the old days when theoreticians were still disputing on *genres* and schools, artists knew where they stood regarding all these things. Rubens said to his students before a picture of uncertain authorship: “I do not believe the artist, unknown and perhaps no longer living, who has given the world this legacy, ever belonged to any school, or ever painted anything but this one picture, which is a personal affair—a piece out of a man’s life.”⁵ And, reporting these words when almost seventy, Walt Whitman knew what he was saying—knew, if ever any man in America did, what was a work made out of the whole existence of one man.

It would be easy, however, by compiling a list of gnomic passages gleaned from the numerous prefaces, explanations, glosses and memoires with which the volume of his *Prose Works* is crowded, to throw a paradoxical light on many aspects chosen among the gaudiest of Whitman’s predication, and unsuspected consequences would result from it—consequences unsuspected not only by the author.

Walt Whitman said: “Our fundamental want today in the United States, with closest, amplest reference to present conditions, and to the future, is of a class, of native authors, literatuses, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life . . . affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage, with results inside and underneath the elections of Presidents or Congresses—radiating, begetting appropriate teachers, schools, manners, and, as its grandest result, accomplishing . . . a religious and moral character beneath the political and productive and intellectual bases of the States.”⁶ It should be noted that this is one of his great obsessions; there are traces of it at the very beginning of the volume of his *Prose Works*. If then we put side by side with it the companion obsession whose singularity nobody has yet noticed:

the story of the world seen only through its supreme literary manifestations, through the great national poems, and if we recall his naturalistic habit of declaiming in the open air, which frightened the seagulls of Coney Island, as he has described it himself, or entertained the omnibus-drivers of Broadway at the expense of Homer, Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Ossian and other immortals, we shall find it easy to build up on documents such a paradoxical theory of the Whitman phenomenon as we mentioned above. To the aforesaid poems—the contemporaries, Walter Scott and Alfred Tennyson were counted, like Ossian, as great national poets—we must add the numerous magazines of the time, Emerson, natural history books, encyclopaedias, melodramas, and we shall have all the apparent, exterior culture of Walt Whitman.

And then, in conclusion, we shall say that Walt Whitman wanted to do for America what the various national poets have done in their day for their own people. Walt Whitman is quite obsessed with this romantic idea which he was the first to transplant to America; he sees America and the world only in relation to the poem which will express them in the XIXth century and in comparison with this nothing else matters. He it is, the great primitive, the fierce enemy of all literature that deprives nature of its spontaneity—he it is who, in a supreme lament on the extinction of the red race, has said: “(No picture, poem, statement passing them to the future) . . .”⁷

Walt Whitman lived out the idea of this mission so intensely that, though not avoiding the fatal failure of such a design, he yet avoided through it the failure of his work. He did not write the primitive poem of which he dreamed, but the poem of that dream. He did not succeed in his absurd attempt to create a poetry adapted to the democratic and republican world and to the character of the newly discovered land—because poetry is one—but as he spent his life repeating this design in various forms, he made poetry out of this very design, the poetry of the discovery of a world new in history and of the singing of it. To put the apparent paradox in a nutshell, he wrote poetry out of poetry-writing.

But we have said, Walt Whitman worked consciously and with a certain critical sense. And it would seem from this essay on poetic art that he certainly was not the best historian of his own work. The case is complex at this stage. Walt Whitman deceived himself about the scope, the effects, and the meaning of *Leaves of Grass*; we might even say that he raved about such matters. But it is quite

another matter with the essence and nature of his book and I cannot bring myself to believe that a poet, and especially a poet like Walt Whitman, who undertakes to renovate the expression and the spirit of the taste of his time, if he succeeds in producing something vital, should fail to know afterwards how it is done, in other words that he should fail to know why he has written in this way rather than in that way and on this rather than on that. Especially Walt Whitman, I repeat, who has not even the ambiguous halo of a very young poet to protect himself, but at thirty, after trying various trades, after pitiful attempts at short-story writing and journalism, put together a hundred pages or so after working at it for at least four years, and slowly evolved, developed, enriched, modified it in an indefatigable search for a better expression of his thought. Any one reflecting upon it without knowing the work would find it quite natural for Walt Whitman to have indulged in doctrinal idiosyncrasies. But there remains the problem that while none of those who shared his culture has been able to draw from it anything but collections of medieval ballads or hymns to progress, Walt Whitman has worked the miracle of *Leaves of Grass*, through it or in spite of it.

And anyone who knows how to read will soon discover in the *Prose Works* certain protests, certain assertions, certain intuitions (for lack of a better word) which are definitely among the best passages of all Whitman's erratic critical essays. Let us think, for instance, of the serenity with which the poet analyzes the reasons and motives of his book in the already quoted *A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads*. The first thing he says about it is this: ". . . a feeling or ambition to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic Personality in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America—and to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book."⁸ At bottom, after the usual absurd expositions of the truly democratic nature of *Leaves of Grass*, there recurs as a conclusion the idea that the book is not the expression of an imaginary world, or a gallery of detached figures (the vignettes), but a Person, a sensibility, living in the real world. "*Leaves of Grass* indeed (I cannot too often reiterate) has mainly been the outcropping of my own emotional and other personal nature—an attempt, from first to last, to put a Person, a human being (myself

in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, in America) freely, fully and truly on record."⁹ This idea, besides its critical bearing on Walt Whitman's work, is of singular historical importance, because there appeared with it for the first time in America the problem which in the twentieth century all American artists have again tried to solve. However one may define it, there is something eternal and ever new about this problem. While a European artist, belonging to the Old World, will maintain that the secret of art is to build up a more or less imaginary world, to deny reality in order to replace it by a much more significant one, an American of the recent generations will tell you that his ideal is to reach the true nature of things, to see things with virgin eyes, to attain that "ultimate grip of reality"¹⁰ which alone is worth acquiring. A kind of conscious adaptation of the self to the world and to America. It is therefore fair to recognize that Walt Whitman has not only been the first to evince in his work this tendency of the national culture, but has also discovered it within himself and formulated it with a great critical clarity that few of his commentators have been able to attain.

If I do not believe that the *form* of Walt Whitman's poetry consists of a series of small pictures remarkable for their gracefulness, as many commentators have declared or suggested, I do not believe either that the architecture of the whole book is in any way effective, contrary to what Walt and his disciples always thought.

The small pictures, or vignettes, would be those short impressionistic poems—or fragments of poems—in which a figure, a scene, a thought or a landscape is fixed in its essential lines: and they also had the defect of multiplying pitilessly as he grew older on account of the half-ridiculous, half-pitiful mania of the "sage of Camden" for seeing in every small thing the symbol of his vast system and to express it in a parallel, an image, or a description. Yet, in a nature like his, which had a tendency to prophesy, the vignette, in which he was generally so skilled, rather took the form of an apologue or exemplification justified by the whole of his doctrine and of his book. But more recent critics who have rightly rejected his prophetic pretensions, have merely deprived the vignettes of their support and meaning, reducing them to miserable fragments, and completely destroying the perspective, because it has naturally become the fashion to consider best among the vignettes the more melodramatic of them, like "O Captain! My Captain!," "Come up from the Fields, Father," and "The Singer in Prison."

The extreme justification of the vignettes, which consisted of the architectural design of *Leaves of Grass*, represents—as all may see—the translation into art of the prophetic impulse, the practical purpose of the book, in the same way as the bold architecture of the *Divine Comedy*. Yet, as the architecture of *Leaves of Grass* is made up of less appreciated philosophical material, or as it bears little resemblance to a cathedral, or for some other reason, there has been less hostility towards it than towards that of the *Divine Comedy*, and the boldest are finally those who accept it, claiming as an excuse that, all things considered, the order of the poems is in its essential lines the chronological order of their composition," and so the matter ceases to be worth examining.

Thus we must dismiss the vignettes—the effete or modest impressions as well as the descriptive passages of the long "Songs"—and the structure of the book—a useless hierarchy imposed on identical pages of argument or passion—but where then shall we find Walt Whitman's form?

Let us pause to consider a poem, a long poem I should say, the hardest piece of *Leaves of Grass*, the "Song of Myself." As early as the first edition this "Song" stood out as the main poem of the book though without a title as yet, and it shared the fortune of the rest of the book, undergoing changes, corrections, suppressions and additions of all kinds. In 1881 we find it in its definitive form, with fifty-two sections, enormous even by comparison with the poems of the first brood "aux titres immenses, les mastodontes et les iguanodons de la création whitmanienne."¹² This "Song of Myself" is, as it were, the quintessence of *Leaves of Grass*: one can find in it all the themes, the profound with the simple, contained in Whitman's poetry.

One of the interesting points about it is that just as the whole book is worthless as far as the structure is concerned, so this poem could bear, without any harmful consequences, long suppressions or additions or transfers, which is precisely what the author has done or would have gone on doing if he had not been prevented by the accidental occurrence of old age and death. Do we mean by this that the worth of the poem lies in the fragmentary pictures in which some realistic description holds the attention? Not at all, though there are in it passages which can be neglected and others which can be counted among the one hundred best pages of the poetry of all times.

Let us begin with the meter. It is a waste of time—and I have wasted a lot myself—to go through the *Prose Works* of the good gray poet with the hope of extracting from *Specimen Days*, from his experiences as a wound-dresser during the Civil War and his happy holidays as a nudist in the solitude of Timber Creek, pages, fragments, vignettes comparable to similar themes in *Leaves of Grass* and apt to show conclusively that there is no difference between his prose and his poetry. No one admires more than I do the artistic prose of Walt Whitman, but it is further necessary to point out that it was almost all written after the Civil War, during his illness, when his beard was already at least grizzly. I have already shown how, from then on, Walt Whitman brooded rather long over his poems and, though he discovered the new vein which we might call "contemplative" [cf. all *Leaves of Grass* from *Autumn Rivulets* (1881) to *Old Age Echoes* (posthumous)], yet in that Indian summer of the impressions, thoughts, revealing comparisons and endless flowering of his vignettes, in spite of numerous new qualities, there is lacking the vigor and the thrill which transfigured even the most allegorical or dogmatic pages of the first *Leaves of Grass*. Almost all his poems from *Autumn Rivulets* (which he began to compose as early as 1865) to his death, would gain in immediacy, clarity, and power by being written in prose. And the prose passages which accompany them, are indeed undoubtedly preferable. On the contrary, in what he wrote before *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (1871), who wants to read, or even remembers nowadays, his few prose writings? There are therefore two parts in Whitman's work: his poetry and his prose, and there is between his poetry and his prose a fundamental difference which cannot be ignored, for it would amount to confounding, among other things, what Walt Whitman himself differentiated with such care.

Notes

¹Bliss Perry, Basil de Sélincourt, Valéry Larbaud, H. B. Binns, Régis Michaud, among others.

²For a recent example Cf. Lidia Rho Servi, *Intorno a Walt Whitman* (About Walt Whitman), Turin, 1933.

³Cf. "Queries to my Seventieth Year," *Leaves of Grass, Inclusive Edition*, Edited by Emory Holloway (Garden City, 1926), p. 422. (Hereafter referred to as "Inclusive Edition.")

⁴"A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 535.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶"Democratic Vistas," *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, Vol. II, p. 210.

⁷"Yonnondio," *Inclusive Edition*, p. 433.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 523-524.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 535.

¹⁰The phrase is Sherwood Anderson's in *Dark Laughter*, but the general idea can be verified only by studying extensively all the vast field of North American experiments in poetry during the last thirty years.

¹¹Basil de Sélincourt, *Walt Whitman—A Critical Study*, 1914. Cf. all the chapter entitled "Plan."

¹²"... of the immense titles, the mastodons and iguanodons of Whitman's creations," Valéry Larbaud, *Oeuvres Choisies de Walt Whitman*, 1930, p. 32.

Whitman in Latin America

WALT WHITMAN WAS introduced to Latin America in 1887 by José Martí, a Cuban journalist. While in political exile from Cuba he heard Whitman give his Lincoln address in New York, and the enthusiastic account which he wrote, first published in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires, received wide circulation in South America. According to Fernando Alegría (*Walt Whitman en Hispanoamerica*, Mexico, 1954, p. 22 ff.) it was Martí who introduced *Leaves of Grass* to Rubén Darío and thereby caused him to include in the second edition of his *Azul* a sonnet which was to become one of the most famous and influential poetic tributes ever paid to the American poet. As Alegría says ("The Whitman Myth" *Americas*, February, 1954, p. 10), "in the Hispanic world the figure of a prophet-bard not only is not in the least strange, but might be described as traditional and common. Therefore, neither the public nor the critics wonder at a canonized image of Whitman, or submit it to pertinent doubts and investigations." Consequently, for over half a century all South American writers on Whitman glorified his life and looked upon him as the Yankee saint.

Léon Bazalgette's idealized *Walt Whitman, L'Homme et Son Oeuvre* (1908) was widely read in the Hispanic world and for many years was regarded as the final word on the poet's life. But in the first decade of the twentieth century a Whitman cult began to form in Spain. The journalist, "Angel Guerra," wrote about Whitman in 1910-11, and in 1913 the distinguished critic, Cebría Montoliu, published in Catalan *Walt Whitman, L'Home i Sa Tasca*, a perspective study of the poet and his message. Two years later Armando

Donoso, in Chile, wrote on "the biblical qualities of Whitman's personality in contrast to the 'crude' accents of Yankee civilization." Another Chilean, Arturo Torres-Ríaseco praised the poet's nationalism in *Walt Whitman* (1922).

As late as 1946 Concha Zardoya of Spain still accepted the canonized version of Whitman's life (Introduction to her translation of selected poems and prose, *Walt Whitman, Obras Escogidas*), but in a lecture at the University of Chile in 1942 Pepita Turina had already given a more realistic interpretation of Whitman, based on the latest results of North American scholarship. In 1944 José Gabriel, of Spain and Argentina, also gave a realistic account in *Walt Whitman, la Voz Democrática de América*, without under-rating the poet's humanity and literary stature. But the following year the Argentine poet Luis L. Franco, in his *Walt Whitman*, presented one of the most impassioned idealizations of the American poet and *Leaves of Grass* in all Whitman literature.

One of the sanest and best informed critics in South America of Whitman is Gilberto Freyre, of Brazil, whose *O Camarada Whitman* appeared in 1948. To quote Alegría again ("The Whitman Myth"): "Freyre, a man of science, does not allow himself to be deceived by the brilliance of Whitman's metaphors, and his opinion of Whitman's sexual complex is as precise and clear as a clinical document." In 1950 Elena Aizen de Moshinsky presented a scholarly, documented thesis on "*Walt Whitman*" y la *America Latina* to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the National University in Mexico. Alegría, now a professor in a North American university, has written in his study of Whitman's reception in Hispanoamerica the most notable criticism of Whitman in the Spanish language, and his book will undoubtedly have a far-reaching influence on the poet's future in South America.

The Poet Walt Whitman

April 19, 1887*

By José Martí

Translated by Arnold Chapman

"LAST NIGHT HE SEEMED a god, sitting in his red velvet chair, his hair completely white, his beard upon his breast, his brows like a thicket, his hand upon a cane." This is what a newspaper says today of the poet Walt Whitman, a man of seventy whom the deeper critics—always in the minority—assign to an extraordinary place in the literature of his country and times. Only the holy books of antiquity, with their prophetic language and sturdy poetry, afford a doctrine comparable to that which is given out in grand, sacerdotal apothegms, like bursts of light, by this elderly poet, whose amazing book has been banned.

And why not, since it is a natural book? Universities and Latin quotations have brought men to such a state as to recognize each other no longer. Instead of throwing themselves into mutual embrace, attracted by essential, eternal qualities, they draw apart, exchanging compliments like village gossips; and all because of chance differences. Like a pudding in a mold, a man takes on the shape of an energetic teacher or a book with which mere fortune or fashion has placed him in contact. Philosophical, religious, or literary schools set a uniform on a man's back, like livery on a footman's; men let themselves be branded like horses or bulls, and show the mark to the world. Therefore when they find themselves in the presence of a man who is naked, virginal, loving, sincere, and strong—a man who goes forward, who contends, who pulls on his oar—a man who, not letting himself be blinded by misfortune, reads a promise of final happiness in the balance and harmony of the world; when they find themselves in the presence of Walt Whitman the father-man, muscular and angelic, they flee as from their own consciences and refuse to recognize this specimen of fragrant, superior humanity as the true type of their species, which appears faded, standardized, and puppetlike.

*First published in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, and widely reprinted in South America. Martí heard Whitman give his Lincoln Lecture in New York on April 19, 1887.

The newspaper says that yesterday, when another venerable man, Gladstone, had finished giving his rivals in Parliament a list of instructions concerning the rightfulness of granting Ireland a government of its own, he was like a mighty mastiff, standing erect and unchallenged in the midst of the crowd, which lay at his feet like a pack of bull terriers. So seems Whitman, with his "natural persons," with his "Nature without check with original energy," with his "myriads of youths, beautiful, gigantic," with his belief that "the smallest sprout shows there is really no death," with the impressive naming of peoples and races in his "Salut au Monde!," with his resolve that "knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself"; so seems Whitman, "he who does not say these things for a dollar"; he who says, "I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing"; he who has no professorship or pulpit or school. So seems he when compared to the spiritless poets and philosophers—philosophers of a detail or of a single aspect—sweetness-and-light poets, patterned poets, bookish poets, philosophical or literary figurines.

* * * * *

You must study him, for while he is not a poet of the most refined taste, he is the most daring, inclusive, and uninhibited of his times. In his frame cottage, standing on the verge of poverty, he displays in a window a portrait of Victor Hugo, bordered in black. Emerson, whose words purify and uplift, used to put his arm on Whitman's shoulder and call him his friend. Tennyson, the kind of man who sees to the roots of things, sends affectionate messages to "the grand old man," from his oaken armchair in England. Robert Buchanan, the Englishman of the fiery words, cries out to the North Americans, "What can you know of literature if you let the old age of your colossal Walt Whitman run out without the honors it deserves?"

"The truth is that reading him, although it causes amazement at first, leaves a delightful feeling of convalescence in the soul, which has been tormented by universal pettiness. He creates his own grammar and logic. He reads in the eye of a bull and in the sap of a leaf." "The man who cleanses your house of dirt—that man is my brother!" His apparent irregularity, disconcerting at first, becomes later, except for brief moments of extraordinary clarity, the sublime order and composition with which mountain peaks loom against the horizon.

He does not live in New York, his "beloved Manhattan," his "superb-faced" and "million-footed" Manhattan, where he looks in

whenever he wishes to sing a song of "what I behold Libertad." Cared for by "loving friends," since his books and lectures provide scarcely enough for his daily bread, he lives in a small house nestled in a pleasant country nook. From here, in his carriage drawn by the horses he loves, he goes out to see the "stout young men" at their virile diversions, the "comrades" who are not afraid to rub elbows with this iconoclast who wants to establish "the institution of the dear love of comrades"; to view the fields they till, and the friends who pass by arm-in-arm, singing; and the sweethearts in couples, cheerful and lively as partridges. He tells of this in his *Calamus*, a very strange book in which he sings of the love of friends: "Not the pageants of you, not your shifting tableaus . . . repay me. . . . Nor the processions in the streets, nor the bright windows with goods in them, Nor to converse with learn'd persons . . . ; (but that as I pass through my Manhattan the eyes I meet offer me love); . . . Lovers, continual lovers, only repay me." He is like the old men whom he announces at the end of his censored book, his *Leaves of Grass*: "I announce myriads of youths, beautiful, gigantic, sweet-blooded; I announce a race of wild and splendid old men."

He lives in the country, where natural man, in the sunshine that tans his skin, plows the free earth with his tranquil horses; but not far from the hospitable, teeming city, with its life noises, its many occupations, its thousand-fold epic, the dust of its wheels, the smoke of the heavy-breathing factories, the sun looking down on it all, the workers who talk at lunch on piles of bricks, the ambulance that speeds along with the hero who has just fallen from a scaffold, the woman surprised in the midst of a crowd by the august pain of maternity.

But yesterday Whitman came from the country to speak, before a gathering of loyal friends, an oration on another man of Nature, the great, gentle soul, the "great dead star of the West," Abraham Lincoln. All literate New York attended that luminous speech in religious silence, for its sudden grace notes, vibrant tones, hymnlike fugues, and Olympian familiarity seemed at times the whispering of stars. Those brought up in the Latin tradition, whether academic or French, could not perhaps understand that heroic humor. The free and decorous life of man on a new continent has created a wholesome, robust philosophy that is issuing forth upon the world in athletic epodes. For the largest number of free, industrious men that Earth ever witnessed, a poetry is required that is made of inclusiveness and faith, calming and solemn; poetry that rises, like the sun out of the sea, kindling the clouds, rimming the wave crests

with fire, waking the tired flowers and the nests in the prolific forests of the shore. Pollen takes wing, birds exchange kisses; branches make ready; leaves seek the sun; all creation breathes music: with the language of the strong light Whitman spoke of Lincoln.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful products of contemporary poetry is the mystic threnody Whitman composed on the death of Lincoln. All Nature accompanies the sorrowful coffin on its road to the grave. The stars have predicted it. The clouds have been darkening for a month. In the swamp a grey-brown bird sings a song of desolation. With the thought and the knowledge of death the poet goes through the grieving fields as between two companions. With a musician's art he groups, conceals, and reproduces these sad elements in a total twilight harmony. When the poem is done it seems all Earth has been clothed in black and the dead man has covered it from sea to sea. The clouds come, the veiled Moon announcing the catastrophe, the long wings of the grey-brown bird. It is much more beautiful, strange, and profound than Poe's "Raven." The poet carries a sprig of lilacs to the coffin.

His whole work lies in that.

Willows no longer weep over tombs; death is the harvest, the outlet, the great revealer. What is now in existence existed before and will exist again; oppositions and apparent griefs are blended in a solemn, celestial Springtime; a bone is a flower. Close at hand the sound of suns is heard, which with majestic movement seek their definitive station in space; life is a hymn; death is a hidden form of life; the sweat of the brow is holy, and intestinal fauna are holy; men should kiss one another's cheeks in passing; the living should embrace with ineffable love; they should love the grass, animals, air, sea, pain, death; suffering is less intense for souls possessed by love; life has no sorrows for him who understands its meaning soon enough; honey, light, and a kiss are of the same seed. In the darkness that shines peacefully like a dome crowded with stars; to soft music, over worlds asleep like dogs at its feet, a serene, enormous lilac tree rises.

* * * * *

Each social category brings to literature its own mode of expression, in such fashion that the history of peoples could be told in the various phases of literature, with greater truth than in chronicles and annals. There can be no contradictions in Nature; the same human aspiration to find a perfect type of charm and beauty in love, during this existence and in the unknown life after death,

shows that in the total life we must rejoicingly fit together the elements which in the portion of life we presently traverse seem disunited and hostile. A literature that announces and spreads the final, happy concert of apparent contradictions; a literature that, as a spontaneous counsel and instruction from Nature, proclaims in a single, overshadowing peace the oneness of the dogmas and rival passions that in the elemental state of peoples divide and plunge them into bloody conflict; a literature that in the timid spirit of men inculcates such a deep-rooted conviction of justice and definitive beauty that the privations and sordidness of existence will not discourage or embitter them; such a literature will not only reveal a social status closer to perfection than any known but also, felicitously joining reason to grace, will provide Humanity, eager for marvels and poetry, with the religion it has been confusedly awaiting ever since it realized the hollowness and insufficiency of its old creeds.

Who is so ignorant as to maintain that poetry is not indispensable to the peoples of the earth? There are persons of such mental myopia that they believe a fruit is finished after the rind. Poetry, which unites or severs, which fortifies or anguishes, which bears up souls or dashes them down, which gives men faith and comfort or takes them away, is more necessary to peoples than industry itself, since the latter bestows the means for subsisting, while poetry gives them desire and strength for life. Where would a society go that had lost the habit of thinking confidently about the meaning and scope of its acts? The best among them, those whom Nature has anointed with the holy desire for the future, would lose, in a silent and sorry annihilation, all incentive to surmount human ugliness; and the common herd, the people of appetites, the multitude, would procreate empty sons without godliness, and would raise to essential function those who ought to serve as mere instruments. With the bustle of an always incomplete prosperity they would bemuse the irremediable melancholy of the soul, which takes pleasure only in beauty and sublimity.

Other considerations to one side, freedom should be blessed, because its enjoyment inspires in modern man—who before its appearance was deprived of the calm, stimulation, and poetry of existence—the supreme peace and religious well-being that the world order produces in those who live in the pride and serenity of their free will. Look to the mountains, O poets whose puerile tears dampen deserted altars!

You think religion lost because it is changing form over your heads. Arise, for you are the priests! Freedom is the definitive religion. And the poetry of freedom is the new form of worship. Such poetry calms and beautifies the present, deduces and illumines the future, explains the ineffable purpose and seductive goodness of the universe.

* * * * *

Hark to what this industrious, satisfied people is singing; hark to Walt Whitman. His exercise of himself raises him into majesty, his tolerance into justice, his sense of order into happiness. He who lives in an aristocratic creed is an oyster in its shell, seeing only the prison that enfolds it, and believing, in the darkness, that this is the world. Freedom lends wings to an oyster. And what inside the shell seems a portentous strife becomes, in the light of day, the natural movement of fluids in the energetic pulse of the world.

The world, to Walt Whitman, was always as it is today. It suffices that a thing exists for one to know that it must have existed before, and when its existence shall not be needed, it will not exist. That which exists no longer, that which is not seen, is proved by that which does exist and is seen; for everything is in the whole, one thing explaining the other; and when that which is now ceases to be, it will be proved in its turn by that which comes later. The infinitesimal collaborates toward the infinite, and every thing is in its place: a tortoise, an ox, birds, "winged purposes." It is as lucky to die as to be born, for the dead are alive; "No array of terms can say how much at peace I am about God and about death." He laughs at what they call dissolution, and he knows the amplitude of time. He accepts time absolutely. All is contained in his person; all of him is in everything else; where one sinks, he sinks; he is the tide, the influx and the efflux; why shall he not be proud of himself, since he feels he is a live and intelligent part of Nature? What does it matter to him if he return to the bosom from whence he came and, in the cool, moist earth, be converted into a useful plant, a beautiful flower? He will nourish men, after having loved them. His duty is to create; the atom that creates is of divine essence; the act in which one creates is exquisite and sacred. Convinced of the identity of the universe, he intones the "Song of Myself." Out of all things he weaves the song of himself: of the creeds that struggle and pass, of man who procreates and labors, of the animals that help him—ah, of the animals! "Not one kneels to another, nor is superior to any other, nor complains." He sees himself as heir to the world.

Nothing is strange to him, and he takes all into account: the creeping snail, the ox that looks at him with its mysterious eyes, the priest who defends a part of the truth as though it were the whole truth. A man should open his arms and clasp all things to his heart, virtue the same as crime, dirtiness the same as cleanliness, ignorance the same as wisdom. He should fuse all things in his heart, as in a furnace; he should drop his white beard over all things. But—mark this well!—“We have had ducking and deprecating about enough.” He rebukes the incredulous, the sophists, the garrulous; let them procreate instead of quarrelling, and they will add something to the world! Creating should be done with the same respect as a pious woman’s who kisses the altar steps!

He belongs to all castes, creeds, and professions, and in all of them finds justice and poetry. He gauges religions without anger, but he thinks the perfect religion is in Nature. Religion and life are in Nature. If there is a sick man, “Go,” he says to the physician and the priest; “I will stay with him. I will open the windows, I will love him, I will speak softly to him. You shall see how he recovers; you are the words and the herbs, but I can do more than you, for I am love.” The Creator is “The great Camerado, the lover true”; men are “cameradoes”; and the more they love and believe, the more they are worth, although anything that keeps its peace and its time is worth as much as any other. But let all see the world for themselves, since he, Walt Whitman, who feels within himself the whole of the world since its creation, knows by what the sun and open air teach him that a sunrise reveals more than the best book. He thinks of orbs, and desires women, feels himself possessed by universal, frenzied love. From scenes of creation and the trades of men he hears rising a concert of music to flood him with joy, and when he looks into a river at the moment when shops are closing and the setting sun ignites the water, he feels he has an appointment with the Creator; he recognizes that man is definitively good and from his head, reflected in the current, he sees spokes of light diverge.

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But what can give an idea of his vast, burning love? This man loves the world with the fire of Sappho. He sees the world as a gigantic bed. A bed is an altar to him. “I will prove illustrious,” he says, “the words and ideas that men have prostituted with their stealth and false shame; I sing and consecrate what Egypt consecrated.” One of the sources of his originality is the Herculean force

with which he prostrates ideas, as though he were going to violate them, when in reality he is only going to give them a kiss, with the fervor of a saint. Another source is the material, brutal, fleshly form with which he expresses his most delicate idealities. Such language has seemed lascivious to some who are incapable of understanding its grandeur. There have been imbeciles who, when in *Calamus* he honors love among friends with the warmest images in the human tongue, have felt they saw, as they tittered like naughty school boys, a return to the ignoble yearning of Virgil for Cebetes and of Horace for Gyges and Lyciscus. And when in *Children of Adam* he sings the divine sin, in pictures that dim the most glowing of the *Song of Solomon*, he trembles, he shrinks, he pours himself out and spreads, he goes mad with pride and satisfied virility; and he recalls the god of the Amazon who passes over forests and rivers scattering seeds of life: "My duty is to create!" "I sing the body electric," Whitman says in *Children of Adam*; and you should first read in Hebrew the patriarchal genealogies of Genesis; you should follow the naked, carnivorous bands of the first men through the trackless jungles, in order to find an appropriate resemblance to the enumeration, full of Satanic might, where like a famished hero licking bloodstained lips he describes the pertinencies of the female body. You say this man is brutal? Listen to this poem which, like many of his, has only two lines: "Beautiful Women."

Women sit or move to and fro, some old, some young,
The young are beautiful—but the old are more beautiful than
the young.

And then there is "Mother and Babe":

I see the sleeping babe nestling the breast of its mother,
The sleeping mother and babe—hush'd, I study them long and
long.

He foresees that just as virility and gentleness combine to a high degree in men of superior temperament, these two qualities must join in the delightful peace on which life itself rests, with solemnity and joy worthy of the universe; these are the two energies that are needed to continue the task of creation.

If he walks into the grass, he says that the grass caresses him, that "he already feels its joints move," and the most uneasy novice would not find such fiery words to describe the joy of his body, which he looks upon as part of his soul, when it feels itself embraced by the sea. All living things love him: earth, night, and the sea love

him: "Penetrate me, oh sea, with your loving moisture." He savors the air. He gives himself to the atmosphere like a tremulous bridegroom. He wants doors with no lock and bodies in their natural beauty; he believes he sanctifies all he touches or that touches him, and he finds virtue in all corporeality; he is

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No more nor less than anyone else.

He depicts truth as a frantic lover who invades his body and, eager to possess him, frees him from his clothes. But in the clarity of midnight the soul, free of occupations and books, emerges integral, silent, and meditative from a nobly spent day, and reflects on the themes that please it most: on night, dreams, and death; on the song of the universal for the benefit of the common man; on how it is very sweet "to die advancing on" and to fall at the foot of a primitive tree, holding the ax in one's hands, stung by the last serpent in the woods.

Imagine, then, what a new, strange effect this language, charged with splendid animality, must produce when it extols the passion which will unite men. In one poem of *Calamus* the poet brings together the delights he owes Nature and country; but he finds that only the ocean waves are worthy to chorus by moonlight his joy at seeing by his side, asleep, the friend whom he loves. He loves the humble, the fallen, the wounded, even the evildoer. He does not scorn the great, for to him only the useful are great. He puts his arm around the shoulders of teamsters, sailors, plowmen. He hunts and fishes with them, and at harvest time climbs with them atop of the loaded wagon. More beautiful to him than a triumphant emperor is a brawny Negro who standing on the string-piece behind his Percherons drives his dray calmly along busy Broadway. He understands all virtues, wins all prizes, works at all trades, suffers all pains, feels a heroic pleasure when he stops on the threshold of a smithy and sees that the young men, stripped to the waist, swing their hammers over-hand and each one hits in turn. He is the slave, the prisoner, he who fights, who falls, the beggar. When a slave comes to his door harried and covered with sweat, he fills a tub for him, has him sit at his table; in the corner he has his fire-lock loaded to defend him; if anyone comes to attack the slave he will kill the pursuer and come back to sit at his table, as though he had killed a snake!

Walt Whitman, then, is satisfied; what pride can sting him when he knows he is standing on a blade of grass or a flower? What pride does a carnation have, or a leaf of salvia, or a honeysuckle vine? Why should he not look on human grief with equanimity when he knows that over all is an endless Being for whom there waits a happy immersion in Nature? What haste shall spur him when he believes all is where it belongs, and the volition of one man cannot change the path of the world? He suffers, it is true; but he considers minor and passing the part of him that suffers, and above toil and misery he feels there is another part that cannot suffer, for it knows universal greatness. It is enough for him to be as he is; and he watches, complacent and amused, the flow of his life, whether in silence or in acclamation. With a single blow he knocks aside romantic lamentation, a useless excrescence. "Not asking the sky to come down to my good will!" And what majesty there is in the phrase where he says that he loves animals "because they do not complain." The truth is that there are already too many who would make cowards of us. There is a pressing need to see what the world is like, in order not to make ants into mountains. Give men strength instead of taking from them with lamentations the little that pain has left them. Do the ulcerated go through the streets showing their sores? Neither doubt nor science disturbs him. "To you the first honours," he says to the scientists, "but science is only a room in my dwelling, it is not my whole dwelling; how poor are subtle reasonings compared to a heroic fact! Long live science, and long live the soul, which is superior to all science." But where his philosophy has completely mastered hate, as the wise men command, is in the phrase—not untinged with the melancholy of defeat—with which he plucks all envy by its roots: "Why should I envy," he says, "any brother of mine who does what I cannot do?" "He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own." "Let the sun penetrate the Earth, until it is all clear, sweet light, like my blood. Let joy be universal. I sing the eternity of existence, the joy of our life, and the implacable beauty of the universe. I wear calfskin shoes, a wide collar, and a cane cut from a branch!"

* * * * *

All this he utters in apocalyptic phrases. Rhymes, stresses? Oh, no! His rhythm lies in the stanzas which, in the midst of an apparent chaos of overlying and convulsed sentences, are nevertheless linked by a wise method of composition that distributes the ideas in

large musical groups, as the natural poetic form of a people who do not build stone by stone but by huge masses of stones.

Walt Whitman's language, entirely different from that which poets have used till now, corresponds in its extravagance and drive to his cyclic poetry and to the new humanity congregated on a fertile *continent* under auspices of such magnitude as not to be contained in ditties or coy lyrics. This is not a matter of clandestine amours or of courtly ladies trading old gallants for new, or of sterile complaints by those who lack the energy to master life, or of discretion suitable to cowards. This is not a matter of jingles and boudoir sighings, but of the birth of an era, the dawn of a definitive religion and of the renewal of mankind. It is a matter of a faith to replace the dead one, and it is revealed in the radiance of a redeemed man's proud peace; it is a matter of writing the holy books for a people who, as the world declines, gather from the udders and Cyclopean pomp of wild Nature all the virgin power of liberty. It is a matter of reflecting in words the noise of settling multitudes, of toiling cities, of tamed oceans and enslaved rivers. Should Walt Whitman then match rhymes and put into mild couplets these mountains of merchandise, forests of thorns, towns full of ships, battles where millions of men lay down their lives to insure the laws, and a sun that holds sway over all and pours its limpid fire into the vast landscape?

Oh, no! Walt Whitman speaks in Biblical verses; without apparent music, although after hearing them for a short time one realizes that these sounds ring like the earth's mighty shell when it is trodden by triumphant armies, barefoot and glorious. At times Whitman's language is like the front of a butcher shop hung with beef carcasses; at others it resembles the song of patriarchs seated in a circle, with the sadness of the world at the time of day when smoke loses itself among the clouds. Sometimes it sounds like an abrupt kiss, like a ravishment, like the cracking of leather as it dries in the sun. But never does his utterance lose its rhythmical, wavy motion. He himself tells how he speaks in "prophetic screams." "These," he says, "are a few words indicating the future." That is what his poetry is, an index finger; a sense of the universal pervades the book and gives it, within the surface confusion, a grandiose regularity; but his sentences—disjointed, flagellant, incomplete, unconnected—emit rather than express. "I fling out my fancies toward the white-topt mountains"; "Say, Earth, old top-knot, what do you want?" "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world."

He does not set in motion, not he, a beggarly thought, to stumble and creep along under the outward opulence of its regal dress. He is not one to puff up humming birds to resemble eagles; he showers down eagles every time he opens his hand, as a sower broadcasts seeds. One line may have five syllables, the following forty, and the one after that ten. He does not strain comparisons; as a matter of fact, he does not compare at all but says what he sees or remembers with a graphic, incisive complement and, being a confident master of the total impression he is ready to create, he uses his art, which is one of entire concealment, to reproduce the elements of his picture with the same disarray in which he observed them in Nature. Although he may wander off, he does not make discords, for this is the way an unordered or unenslaved mind strays from a subject to its analogues; but then, as though he had only loosened the reins without dropping them altogether, he draws them suddenly tight and with a masterful hand keeps close control over his restive team, while his lines gallop along, swallowing up distances with each movement. Sometimes they whinny eagerly like stud stallions; at other, white and lathered, they set their hoofs on the clouds; and at still others, dark and daring, they plunge inside the earth, and the noise is long to be heard. Whitman sketches, but you would say that he uses a fire-tipped point. In five lines he groups, like a sheaf of freshly gnawed bones, all the horrors of war. An adverb is enough to expand or contract a phrase, and an adjective to sublimate it. His method has to be large, since its effect is; but it might be thought that he proceeds without any method whatsoever, especially in his use of words, which mixes elements with unheard-of audacity, putting the august and almost divine side by side with those which are considered the least appropriate and polite. There are some pictures that he does not paint with epithets—which with him are always lively and profound—but with sounds, which he assembles and disperses with consummate skill, thus, with a succession of procedures, maintaining interest, which the monotony of an exclusive mode would have jeopardized. Through repetitions he draws out melancholia like the savages. His caesura, unexpected and run-on, he changes ceaselessly and without conforming to any rule, although an intelligent arrangement can be detected in its developments, pauses, and grace notes. He finds that accumulation is the best way to describe, and his reasoning never assumes the pedestrian form of argumentation or the high-sounding form of oratory, but instead uses the mystery of suggestion, the fervor of uncertainty, and the flaming word of prophesy.

At every step of the way we find words from our Spanish: *viva*, *camarada* [sic], *libertad*, *americanos*. But what could better depict his character than the French words with which, in visible ecstasy and as though to expand their meaning, he incrusts his poems: *ami*, *exalté*, *accoucheur*, *nonchalant*, *ensemble*? *Ensemble*, especially, charms him, for he sees in it the highest sphere of a people's life or a world's. From the Italian he has taken one word: *bravura*!

* * * * *

Thus, honoring muscle and boldness; inviting passersby to put their hands on him without fear; hearing the song of things, with his palms upturned to the air; surprisedly and delightedly proclaiming gigantic secundities; gathering up, in epic verse, seeds, battles, and orbs; showing astounded generations the radiant lives of men who on American valleys and mountains reach out to brush the hem of vigilant Liberty's skirt with bee wings; shepherding centuries toward the sheltering bay of eternal calm; thus while at outdoor tables his friends serve him the first catch of Spring fish washed down with champagne, Walt Whitman awaits the happy hour when the material part of him will withdraw, after having revealed to the world a truthful, sonorous and loving man, and when, given over to the purifying air, he will sprout and perfume it, "carefree, triumphant, dead!"

Walt Whitman's Philosophy*

By Cebría Montoliu

Translated by Fernando Alegría

WE CONSIDER WHITMAN's philosophy only a vision or subjective impression, a pure experience of the soul. Indeed, he is pragmatic *par excellence*, for in his conceptions one finds not only the origin but also the spirit itself of that philosophy of efficiency which would not be methodically formulated in his country until years later. This fact is an excellent proof of the autochthonous nature attributed to that doctrine. Whitman's pragmatism, at heart, is nothing but a pure and spontaneous manifestation of his passionate Ameri-

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canism, a simple expression of his innate and vehement national temperament.

As a good *practical thinker* Whitman systematically avoids formulas. Furthermore, not only does he abhor all formulas and systems but, also, in a most clear and emphatic way, he anticipates those who would deduce a doctrine from his writings and challenges their useless insistence in strong terms.

While Whitman does not formulate, perhaps precisely because he does not formulate, he experiments and believes. His faith is built, as we shall see, on pure experience. There is a certain incompatibility between faith and symbol, just as between experience and doctrine, and this condition makes one of the two disappear when it becomes fused or crystalized in the other. The tragic problem of all life and movement is that they cannot be conceived without being, at the same time, destroyed. Just as we saw Whitman absorb with measureless desire all that was within reach of his hungry senses so we shall see him now absorb, with an equally insatiable instinct, the ideas that were floating in the intellectual atmosphere of his time, and swallow everything, without making distinctions, transforming all into his own substance, even the most contradictory opinions and theories.

We have seen already a sample of this process when we considered the spiritual heritage that our poet received from Emerson. This heritage was so absolutely assimilated that, in his old age, once its narrow limits had been surpassed, Whitman did not even remember having ever used it and digested it at the time of his own personal development. And now we see how by the same means and similar vehicles, Whitman comes into contact with the immense wave of German idealistic subjectivism, then at the climax of its progress. Through the august figure of Carlyle, and by insensible derivations, he reaches this philosophy and permits Fichte and Hegel, especially, to take possession of his spirit to a point where he seems surrounded by their metaphysical eschatologies and rushing towards that hazy goal of a mystic speculation which related the full manifestation of the individual to the apocalyptic predestination of the Germanic country. No wonder then, that driven by the same idealistic whirlwind he gives himself over to the most static levities in Eastern mysticism with which—particularly in its broadest and deepest expression, Hindu theosophy—Whitman seemed to be intimately familiar.

With such antecedents Walt might have become a sort of gynosophist sleep-walker or a starved and frenzied poet, such as those

turned out abundantly by the then fashionable romantic movement. But Walt did not let himself be imprisoned by the subtle threads of this metaphysical net. His spirit, always alert and open to the four corners of the world, absorbs with equal easiness the most ethereal inspirations of the soul and the grossest forms of the material world.

Being an unrepentant sinner, according to his own confession, he declares himself the poet of the body with just as much enthusiasm as he declares himself the poet of the spirit and thinks none of the elements of the surrounding world lacks in divine qualities. It is not strange then to find in his writings—as deeply as the influence of German idealism—the trace left by the opposite and to a certain degree complementary ideologies initiated by Lamarque and Darwin in the field of physical sciences and transplanted by Comte and Spencer to the realm of ethics. Whitman, consistent with his principles, wished to apply to the sacred garden of poetry the method of direct observation, verbal information and objective description which that school had accepted as the only tools worthy of a scientific operation. He was not intimidated by the possibility of being considered prosaic, a charge to which he left himself open because of his didactic tone and particularly because of the long enumerations of objects in some passages of his work. His primordial objective was to live in intimate contact with his country and his epoch and in order to accomplish this he did not spare himself efforts or sacrifices of any kind. Following the recommendations of positive science he availed himself of journalistic information and used it as a source for his poetical work, a fact that is revealed by the piles of clippings which he carefully saved and which were found after his death. The use of New York slang as his main instrument of literary expression, a practice that seemed to revolt some over-scholarly Yankees, should suffice to show how rigidly and completely Whitman attempted to embody the whole configuration of modern thought while pursuing an anti-aesthetic course. Likewise, Whitman, like Christ, wanted to descend to the infernal depths of the brilliant world that supported him, even if it was only to rise with greater strength to the lofty empire of his glorious resurrection. This titanic enterprise left on his work unequivocal signs of his desperate struggle to reconcile the eternal oppositions and to encompass the opposite poles of universal equilibrium. This we must consider a heroic decree of fate. The faults inherent in such an attitude should be viewed with indulgence or, at most, with the charming irony displayed by Emerson when, already an old man, he cast an Olympian glance over the finished work of the poet

and said that it seemed to him a strange mixture of the *Bhagavat-Gita* and the *New York Herald*.

Let us not draw erroneous conclusions from our analysis. No matter how deeply the materialistic forces acted on his spirit, and no matter how idolizing and passionate his sensual inclinations might have been, Whitman was still, at the bottom of his heart, the same Quaker poet already described in our account of his life [omitted in this extract]. Although some simple and devout soul may be scandalized by this assertion, the truth is that Whitman, a great Epicurean, appeared to be transfigured by an insatiable thirst for immortality. "He is a God-intoxicated faun," we feel tempted to exclaim when, without prejudice, we contemplate the entirety of his poetic work in a single glance. For the more we penetrate his spirit, the firmer our conviction grows that Whitman is "the poet of the body" in a most absolute way, not only for what the body is in itself, but also for its divine content. The body reveals this in its highest form and Whitman worships it with idolatry. Because this is so we may say, in a profound sense, that we can hardly conceive of him as a whole unless it is as a great mystic poet, certainly one of the greatest in the history of mankind.

So patent is his direct human vocation, as one of his latest commentators has said (Carleton Noyes in *An approach to Walt Whitman*) that Whitman, the good comrade, seldom appears immediately as a spiritual guide. Those who knew him in life felt irresistibly attracted to him without perhaps discovering the true source of his extraordinary strength and balance. There was more than merely a commanding personal magnetism to distinguish him from the masses. There were unsuspected depths of which his charm was only the overflow and expression. He was endowed with a heroic physique, of great perfection and beauty, and yet the specific essence of his temperament was spiritual. He himself recognized, in a manner allowable only to a few chosen ones, that the central reality of the human being is the soul. The passion and struggle to reach the soul's heritage became the driving force of his life. Once he has cast himself happily into that great adventure, he dares everything, he risks and he suffers all. His happiness lies in the prosecution of this great enterprise. His reward is getting to know God.

In accordance with this mystic vision of the world, Whitman finds the key to life's enigma in death and only in death. But death—and this should be well understood—has for him the mystic sig-

nificance of a bridge which leads to a new phase of eternal life. Death is not cessation, but change of being; it is not the end but the beginning, and in this transition there is no dissolution of continuity; all life tends towards this development and expansion of itself. In regard to the ill-defined question of "immortality," Whitman wastes no time trying to solve it; he considers it a vain problem and simply affirms his belief in it. The conviction of truth comes to him as an intuition, but in such a vital manner that there is no room for argument. Immortality is the premise of all his life experience and his supreme and unique interpretation of it. This concept determines his way of thinking.

Whitman is, then, a real visionary and however correct Bucke may be in fixing the moment of his life when he had this vision, the truth is that this vision did occur and that it transfigured with the most resplendent celestial aura all the life and work of this heroic personality. Once this is accepted, it is hardly necessary to add what Carleton Noyes says: "Whitman's intimate experience cannot be expressed with words." Only the soul knows God and souls have no words. Whitman's religious experience is so intimate and personal that he can express it in his poems only through symbols extracted from common language by his exuberant imagination. One fact clearly stands out from all others in his life: the sum and essence of Whitman's life is Religion. In a sense both mystical and practical, his supreme desire was to attain union between soul and God. Religion, as he conceives it and lives it, is not merely one part of human experience—indeed, the loftiest—but the totality of existence, giving value to all forms of human activity and making possible that "the whole and its parts fit together."

As is usually the case with Anglo-Saxons, Whitman's mysticism is neither egotistical nor static; it does not gravitate towards itself in the sterile fashion of contemplative lives which rejoice in the stagnant waters of a negative passivity following the spirit of some schools in our midst which have monopolized the realm of the soul. On the contrary, Walt transforms his own revelation into a "message," declaring himself the "prophet of a greater Religion." It is difficult to define this religion in a few words, especially when he himself was not able to define it in his whole life. But we might say to the reader that although he may already consider Whitman a mystic pantheist, he must not let himself be deceived by this term, because Whitman's conception of God has nothing of that dry

vagueness so commonly criticized in pantheism. Whitman believes in the divine quality of everything without implying that each thing is God; but rather affirms that God reveals himself in all and each of them. For Whitman *everything is divine*, but if he must choose for his own worship he chooses the human figure as the most divine of all, the true temple of God, as Saint Paul said. What might this God be? This is the mystery. Let us call him, according to Saint Paul, "the unknown God"; let us believe firmly in his revealed work and this will suffice to put us in direct communication with him, although it may be impossible for us to see him. This is precisely what happened to Whitman, according to his own testimony, when he raised a corner of the veil that hides the mystery of his mystic revelation.

Burning in this immense fire of love, in which, as we shall see further on, he is to forge all his ethic and social conception of the world, his religious program is a pure, ample derivation of that brotherly embrace in which he encompasses all beings. He calls it a greater Religion not because he wishes to oppose it to the various religions disputing among each other for the faith of a majority of men, but because he wishes to embrace them all in his powerful arms.

Let us make clear, however, that no eclecticism finds its way into this religious attitude; rather it is the transcendental force itself of his faith which impels him to accept others as approximate instruments for expressing that which in his own faith is essentially inexplicable. The capital center of his mystic apostleship, that which inspired him to write "All is truth" and to search and defend a broader and higher form for his Religion, is found in the profound truth of all things, there, where all divergencies meet.

Such is, in synthesis, Whitman's religious pragmatism. Firmly based on the fundamental findings of his own experience, he always refuses to define the concrete contours of his ideal kingdom so as to allow freedom for every one. However, he was once or twice guilty of attempting definitions. Such is the case of "Chanting the Square Deific," a poem in which Whitman ventures to outline a sort of vast theogonic synthesis coinciding with some commonly accepted formulas and making use of symbols already established by tradition. In this poem, "Chanting . . .," without failing to recognize the ineffable nature of God, Whitman dares to express in human terms that which he humanly conceives as the ineffable and divine prin-

ple of the universe. He draws a symbol magically suggestive of all his gnostic experience.

Four powers or forces compose the Square: law and judgement; love and forgiveness; rebellion and malice; and reconciliation and fusion of all in one. These four powers are personified by Jehovah, Christ, Satan and the Holy Spirit.

Law is the fundamental principle of the universe. Nothing can escape the non-created, fatal norm of its own creation. The decree of compensation by which Law retributes all actions is imperturbable, inexorable and mathematically just. Jehovah is the God-Judge who passes sentence without appeal and executes without scruple.

But this is only the basis of the Square. Interdicting Law and rising against its ruling, Love appears. Christ rises and beholds us, gentle comforter, stretching out his hand to bless us. God is Love and therefore Christ is the most powerful of all gods. Love departs from the Law, but perpetuates it, it does not destroy Law, it only redeems it from its tyranny; Love is the divine grace that bears fruit in the world which is Law's slave, by means of the celestial dew of hope. The individual dies, but Love survives. The Savior passes, but salvation is eternal.

At the extreme opposite of Love, Rebellion rises. The individual affirms himself and his own divine will. This is the domain of Satan, the Anti-Christ, divine and "permanent," the same as any other and as real as any other. Where Law exists, so does transgression of the Law. There is no good without its corresponding evil. In the finite world of human experience the principle of evil is a necessity and will exist as long as its limitations last.

Closing the Square, parallel to Law, satisfying Love, dominating Evil, comes the Holy Spirit. This is the last reality and the only essence of all things, which includes not only the Savior and Satan, but also God himself conceived as a person.

And with the consideration of this brief but superior sketch of theodicy we come to the end of Whitman's bold though really unformulated philosophic conception. We recognize, of course, the grave doubts that the various and startling projections suggested in the course of our brief perusal may have raised in the reader's mind. But, whatever be the absolute value of this amalgamation of the most contradictory ideas and tendencies, one thing is clear and that is that the real tie linking these antitheses is no other than the author's robust personality, a personality which is one of the most

dynamic and compact syntheses to have embodied the volatile and multiform human logos. We must not lose sight of Whitman's inaccessible position on an intellectual level superior to the thousand controversies originated by the juxtaposition of those ideas.

In spite of the doubts that we may feel, it is not useless to surmount these intellectual heights since it is in these heights where we shall find the true source of Whitman's specific opinions in the realm of immediate reality. And if from this postulate of "pure reason" we pass on to the examination of his "practical reason," we shall easily deduce the diverse consequences of the application of those superior principles to the uneasy field of ethical, political and aesthetic problems of contemporary life.

Adamic Song*

By Miguel de Unamuno

Translated by Fernando Alegría

It happened one Biblical afternoon, the towers of the city gloriously resting against the sky like giant ears of golden wheat emerging from the greenness that clothes the river. I took up *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, that American, enormous embryo of a secular poet, about whom Robert Louis Stevenson said that like a shaggy dog, just unchained, went scouring the beaches of the world baying at the moon. I took those leaves and translated some for my friend in the quiet splendor of the golden city.

And my friend said to me: "What a strange impression one gets from those enumerations of peoples and lands, nations, things and plants! . . . Is that poetry?"

And I said to him: "When lyric poetry becomes spiritualized and reaches the sublime it ends in mere enumerations, in uttering dear names with a sigh. The first stanza in the eternal love-dialogue may be "I love you, I love you very much, I love you with all my soul," but the last one, the one that comes with surrender contains only these two words: Romeo! Juliet! Romeo! Juliet! There is no deeper love-sigh than the repetition of the beloved name, relishing it like honey in your mouth. And consider the child. I shall never forget an immortal scene that God put one morning before my eyes. I saw three children hand in hand, standing by a horse, singing

*"El canto adánico," *El espejo de la muerte*, Madrid: Compañía Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1930. Printed with the kind permission of the poet's daughter, María de Unamuno.

nothing but these words in mad delight: A horse! a horse! a horse! They were creating the word as they repeated it. Theirs was a Genesis song.

"How did lyric poetry begin?" asked my friend, "which was the first song?"

"Let us turn to legend," I said, "and listen to what the Genesis says in its second chapter: 'So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him.' This was the first song, the song naming the animals; Adam in ecstasy before them, in the dawn of mankind."

To give a name! To give a name to something is, in a way, to take possession of it spiritually. This same Walt Whitman, whose *Leaves of Grass* we have here, in his "Song At Sunset" said these words: "To breathe the air, how delicious! To speak—to walk—to seize something by the hand!" He could have added: To name things, what a startling miracle!

Upon naming the animals and birds, Adam took possession of them. And note the eighth Psalm: after singing of God's command to man that he be the master of the works created by the divine hands, God having laid everything at his feet—sheep and oxen, beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fishes of the sea, and whatever passes along the path of the sea, the psalm ends: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!" If we knew an appropriate name, a poetic name, a creative name for God, all lyric poetry would be summed up in it as in an eternal flower.

Also in Genesis, verses twenty-four to thirty, chapter thirty-two, we are told how Jacob crossed the ford of Jabbok and, searching for his brother Esau, decided to spend the night outdoors; he was attacked by a stranger, an angel sent by God or perhaps God himself, and during the struggle Jacob, full of anguish, kept inquiring the other's name. In those ancient times a traveler who uttered his name gave away his essential being. Homeric heroes immediately tell us their names.

And these names were not said; they were sung in a surge of enthusiasm and adoration. And I am most certain, reader, that the hymn which most deeply penetrated your heart was that which carried your name, your baptismal name, pure and bare, expressed with a sigh in semi-darkness. That is the crown of lyrical poetry.

The litany is perhaps the most exquisite poetic form that a lyrical explosion can offer: a name repeated as in a rosary and each time joined to lively epithets which enhance it. And among these we find the sacred epithet.

In Homeric poems the sacred epithets shine forth: each hero has his own. Achilles is he of the fast feet; Hector, the plume shaker. And in all times and places when someone finds the sacred epithet which poetically fits a man, everyone adopts it and repeats it. And what is true of men is also true of animals, things and ideas. The sly fox, the faithful dog, the noble horse, the patient donkey, the slow ox, the churlish goat, the mild sheep, the timid hare . . . and Providence's intentions, can they be anything but inscrutable?

Singing, then, a name, enhancing it with a sacred epithet is the reflective exaltation of lyric poetry; and the irreflective exaltation, the supreme, is singing the name by itself, bare, without epithet; it is repeating it again and again, as if submerging one's soul in its ideal content. "I am not surprised," I told my friend, "to see that those enumerations affect you in a strange manner, and I confess to you that they may not possess anything poetical at all. Yet, they seem stranger to those of us who, by means of dead words, have reduced lyric poetry to something oratorical, a sort of rhymed eloquence. Remember besides," I added, "that a word has not attained its splendor and purity until it has acquired rhythm and until it has become joined to others through its own cadence: it is like wheat which is not clean and ready for the mill until it has been purified by winnowing on the threshing floor."

"Now I remember," said my friend inserting a whimsical note, "I remember a Yankee joke which goes like this: when Adam was naming the animals and he approached the horse, Eve told her husband, "This thing that is coming here looks like a horse; so let's call him horse."

"The joke is not bad," I said, "but it happens that when Adam named the country-animals and the birds, woman had not yet been created, according to Genesis. Therefore one must conclude that man felt the need of talking even when he was alone, that is to say, talking to himself, which is the same as singing, so that his act of naming the creatures was an act of lyrical purity, perfectly unselfish. He invented the names to enjoy them in ecstasy. But once he created the names and sang them he needed a fellow creature to whom he could communicate these names; after the naming-hymn had resulted from the exuberance of his enthusiasm, he felt the need of an audience, but, according to the text, Adam did not find help around

him. And immediately after this, the Biblical narration tells us of the creation of woman, growing her out of a rib of the first man, as though man had felt the need for a companion as a result of having mastered the animals by giving them a name. Man was in need of someone to talk to, and so God made a woman for him. And as soon as the woman appears before him, after he said, 'This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,' the first thing that he does is to give her a name, saying: 'this will be called a woman, because out of man she was created.' But the Spanish *varona* did not prevail. The majority of cultured peoples have a name for woman which comes from a different root and which seems to make out of man and woman two different species."

"Except English," said my friend.

"And some other languages," I added.

And gathering up Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* we left behind the splendor of the city melting into the twilight.

Camerado Whitman*

By Gilberto Freyre

Translated by Benjamin M. Woodbridge, Jr.

The man in whom contemporary America [i.e., North and South America] most nearly recognizes its image is good gray Whitman in his open-collared shirt, in his white nurse's smock, in his typesetter's work clothes. Whitman, one of the greatest one-man orchestras of all time, a polyphony, not just one voice. Whitman, full of antagonisms and contradictions, far from coherent, anything but logical; still an adolescent in his adult years, but, at thirty, wearing the hair and beard of an old man; an imperfect, rude, unfinished, and at the same time classic, being; a friend of Emerson and an admirer of Lincoln, and at the same time a man so understandingly human that he never was ashamed to live among "roughs"; the Anglo-American who first celebrated a Negro woman in a poem; an American from the middle class who neither revolted against the middle class nor limited himself, as poet, to a single class, a single race, a single religious creed, a single sex, a single movement, or a single country, but chose to be the comrade of all

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Americans, of all human beings in search of better, or at least more fraternal, times for America and for humanity.

The one who in this way understood his position as man and as poet, as American and as citizen, and ran the risk of being misunderstood by the sectarians of all sects, by the purists of all purisms, by the orthodox of all orthodoxies, anticipated the Americanism which other progressive Americans are only today beginning to attain: integral, pan-human, pan-democratic Americanism. For in the men of America, of the West, and perhaps of the whole world Whitman renewed the sentiment, the conception, the ideal of brotherhood—brotherhood as opposed to any kind of despotic paternalism—with a revolutionary and poetic power such as had not existed among men since that other great poet and revolutionary who was likewise above the paternalistic ideals of his time in questions of class and sect, race and sex: Saint Francis of Assisi.

Whitman lived in times particularly inauspicious for democracy in his country. In his eyes the two presidential candidates in the 1856 elections were, in comparison with Emerson, mere dwarfs; perhaps he would have liked to see as President not a common man, but some extraordinary Emerson. He was therefore disgusted by that exhibition of Lilliputians in the electoral battle for the presidency. For it should be noted that, in spite of all his faith in the common man, Whitman always recognized the need, in posts of authority, for the uncommon man. Uncommon not for academic knowledge or the exquisitely literary or esthetic temperament of a sage or artist divorced from daily life, but for superior capacity for leadership, and at the same time for ability to identify himself with the needs and aspirations of the community. Two of his poems are dedicated to one of those uncommon men who had come from the midst of common men, the son of a woodcutter, in fact—Lincoln. In Lincoln Whitman incarnated his concept of the “redeemer” of the Americans, of the “captain,” of the “first-class leader.”

His faith in democracy was that of one who saw with a clear eye the whole tremendous storm that democratic institutions were passing through in his country and in his time. But even though the anti-democratic winds blew ever stronger; even though the waves mounted ever more terrible against the democratic effort not only of the common men but also of the Lincolns of the United States; even though the black clouds rose ever blacker against the concept of democratic life held by Jefferson and other prophets of the first days of the Republic—it did not matter. The ship of democracy had

not, indeed, been made only for favorable winds, gentle waves, rose-colored clouds:

Ship of the hope of the world—Ship of Promise,
Welcome the storm—welcome the trial,
Why now I shall see what the old ship is made of,
Anybody can sail with a fair wind, or a smooth sea.

Whitman was inspired by a concept of democracy very much in accord with his somewhat Darwinian sense of reality, of life, and of the contradictions of man: a democracy capable of resisting anti-democracy by its own efforts. If it lacked the virility or the capacity to resist the fury of its enemies, then democracy did not deserve to survive.

In his eyes, anti-democracy was embodied not only in absolute monarchy but also in a powerful plutocracy. Not only in the feudal slave-holding system of the South but also in the industrial capitalism of the North with its new kings and barons at the head of banks and privileged business enterprises. That is why Whitman always censured the abolitionists for narrowness of vision: they saw a single social problem, that of the liberation of a race exploited and dominated by agrarian feudalism. No single race or class or region ever seemed to Whitman such a cause as a democrat should fight for. "America" itself seems to have been for him less a physical than a social expanse: the symbol of humanity or of the world of the future which, by "manifest destiny," would have its center in the American continent. In his opinion—that is what his Americanism seems to indicate, an Americanism to which we can perhaps compare the Slavism of modern Russian Stalinists—the American continent was the one most fit to take the lead in the realization of a democracy as nearly complete as possible: social, not merely political; ethnic—though he did not emphasize as much as José Bonifácio this aspect of human intercourse, whose democratization seems a characteristically Brazilian contribution to the democratic complex—not merely economic. For Whitman's concept of democracy was a total one, not merely a narrowly political one, much less a mechanically electoral one.

So that, on the approach of the War of Secession, a conflict rather between two antagonistic economic systems than between two regions, Whitman did not let himself be dominated completely by either of the partisan creeds: neither by that of Yankee unionism nor by that of state autonomy defended by the Southern slave-hold-

ers. His vision of America—at least of English America—in 1860 was already that of the “indissoluble continent” which today inspires so many of us:

... divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

One of the most lucid interpreters of Whitman—I refer to Professor Ralph Henry Gabriel—emphasizes what the Civil War meant for the poet, ever confident in democracy’s power of resistance to anti-democratic forces: in 1872 Whitman recalled that those terrible days of conflict showed that “popular democracy, whatever its faults and dangers, practically justifies itself beyond the proudest claims and the wildest dreams of its enthusiasts.” Not that, in Whitman’s opinion, the Civil War had resulted in the rose-colored triumph of democracy over plutocracy. Agrarian slavocracy had been ruined, and abolition had won its small battle for the emancipation of the blacks from agrarian and feudal slavery—that was all. But the war had been democratic because it had brought common men from the two regions into the bitter struggle, over a question of duty democratically conceived. And those men had borne themselves valiantly in combat. After the victory of the North over the South, at a time when—as in the sad case of General Grant himself—some of the highest offices of the Republic were held by persons who did not always honor them, those men continued to be the reserve of vitality and of manliness, of honesty and of sense of responsibility, of which the war had revealed the existence among the common people of both North and South. And Whitman’s faith in democracy as a process or method of human intercourse rested on his faith in those men.

When he addressed as “comrades” all human beings—not only those of his own economic class or of his own intellectual caste, of his own region or territorial area, or of his own race of white-skinned, blond-haired men—there was not in that fraternization of Whitman’s with all Americans—or with all human beings of his day capable of the same fraternalism—the affected or conventional attitude of the sectarian of an ideology that, though international, was nevertheless exclusive as to the class, the race, the activity, or the sex of individuals. “Comrade” was his natural way of speaking, in a manner at once Franciscan and Hellenic, to other men free from artificial and preconceived ideas. There was in his attitude almost no Hebraism, the exclusive, ethnocentric Hebraism that spread from the Hebrews to the Anglo-Saxon Protestants known as Puritans, in

whose spirit on occasion was jeopardized the democratic, and at the same time Christian, conception of life and of human relations. "Comrade" was his way of addressing other men who were simply men. Simply men and women. Common men, not supermen in the Nietzschean sense. For it was common men—I repeat—who made possible Whitman's democratic faith. He believed in the future of democracy in an epoch as troubled for American democracy as that in which he lived because he came to know the common man, the average man—the average man, it should be noted, not merely the middle-class man—the simple man of his country; because he saw him at close range with all his defects and all his good qualities; because he became conscious of his basic virtues not only through the eyes of a poet but also through the clinical eyes of a nurse, not to say a doctor. It was through those eyes that he saw, on the naked bodies of the men whom he treated, wounds caused not only by war but also by social malformations of peace time; it was through those eyes that he saw not only the naked bodies of hundreds of common men but also the naked souls or personalities of men near death. Many were the common men—soldiers of the abolitionist North and of the slave-holding South—who died in his fraternal arms as in those of an older brother. Many were the common men who confessed in Whitman's ears their last worldly thoughts.

Perhaps his long white hair made him seem paternal or maternal in the eyes of fatally wounded young men. But he was above all an older brother to the soldiers of both North and South. Perhaps also a sister in a sense parallel to that in which our illustrious Miguel Couto desired to be for his widowed mother rather a daughter than a son.

Whitman was a rough-hewn giant, but it seems that as a nurse to the sick who were closest to death, he could be as gentle as a woman. So fraternal was he in his sense of life and of human relations and so capable of tenderness in those relations—a tenderness which, generally speaking, in the civilizations where the sexes are most intensely differentiated, is accepted only in women—that some of his attitudes and some of his poems have been interpreted as affirmations or sublimations of narcissism and even of homosexuality, which has been confused with bisexuality. It is bisexualism of attitude, not of action, born of empathy, not of vice, that is found in Whitman. For he seems not to have indulged in homosexual practices either in the debauched manner of a Verlaine and an Oscar Wilde, or even in an attempt, difficult but ethically oriented, to

“normalize” tendencies less common than the dominant ones: the tremendous effort, in our day, of an André Gide. He seems principally to have had the courage of great friendships with other men (sometimes, perhaps, with a remote homosexual basis) alongside enthusiasms for “perfect women”—a fact which emphasizes the bisexuality of his attitude; and the “narcissism” of celebrating the beauty of the human body—that of man as well as that of woman—not merely the grace and charm of a woman’s body seen through the eyes of a man.

Dugas, in his study on friendship, points out that where friendship was a cult, as in the classical civilizations, relations among friends did not imply the absence or the sacrifice of relations of any of them with the public in general. Walt Whitman, reacting against agrarian feudalism and feudal industrialism, both of them responsible for rigid hierarchies between the sexes and among men—hierarchies hostile to great friendships, which are mostly fraternal ones—restored the cult of friendship without sacrificing to that cult his public spirit: he was a friend to some and a comrade to many. He would have liked to be a comrade to all or nearly all. Hence his democratic solution of the problem: his fraternalism expressed in the feeling of a *comrade*, an extension of the feeling of a *friend*. All of these sentiments were aspects of the same democratic spirit: that of fraternity.

Saint Francis of Assisi, in his poetic rebellion against the Hebraically or feudally paternalistic excesses within the Church, had extended that democratic fraternalism beyond men, applying it to water, to fire, to animals, to trees. All things were his brothers. Whitman, naturalistic, yes, but above all personalistic in the best sense, did not go so far. Nor did he go to the extreme of another type of rude naturalism: that of Thoreau, who seems to have preferred leaning on the branches of New England trees to trusting in the support of human arms, even friendly ones. For Whitman the term “comrade” included all men able to understand, love, and complete one another through human symbols and human means of integration. Integration of individuals into one another, according to special affinities; and of all persons, fraternally, into the community.

At the same time his conception of friendship was akin to Saint Augustine’s as it is revealed in the *Confessions*. There Augustine says that he does not know how he can go on living after losing the friend who in life complemented him to such a degree that the two

formed "only one soul." Such is, or seems to be, the meaning of Whitman's famous "Calamus" poems, which belong in the same category as the great Church Father's famous pages, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

That was what overflowed most abundantly from Whitman into his books: a personalistic and fraternalistic sense of life and of the community, a sense so vibrant as to seem at times homosexuality gone mad whereas it was probably only bisexuality sublimated into fraternalism. Whitman was not, as a poet, much less as a writer, impersonal, inhuman, esoteric, cut off from his condition as a man, a person, a citizen. Poet, citizen, and man formed in him a complex of inseparable activities and conditions. In this he was like an Iberian. The Iberians are most likely to be made that way: integral personalities in whom the intellectual, the artist, or the public figure on the one hand and the private citizen on the other are identified to such a degree that it is impossible to distinguish the private individual in them from the writer or the artist, the political figure or the mystic. When Whitman exclaimed very Whitmanesquely one day, characterizing one of his books,

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,

he spoke in an English that seems translated from Spanish or Portuguese. Thus would have spoken Angel Ganivet or Anthero de Quental; Saint Juan de la Cruz or the author of *Don Quixote*; and especially Ramón Lull.

In Whitman the idea of emotional interpenetration of the individual and the masses, of the poet and the community, was a constant. There was no suggestion of what we should today call "racism" in that interpenetration. His sense of community was, or is, sociological, not biologically ethnic, just as his sense of life and nature was, or is, rather Hellenic than Hebraic although in his mode of expression, in his rhythm, in his poetic breathing there are not lacking clearly Biblical, and therefore chiefly Hebraic, echoes. But let us not forget that the Bible that had the greatest influence on Whitman, as a boy and the son of a carpenter, was the Bible interpreted by Quakers; and let us recall that the Quakers are a kind of Franciscans of Protestantism.

Whitman would be amazed at being compared to the Franciscans. There are those who practice Christianity or Franciscanism without realizing that they are Christians or Franciscans—they are

sociologically Franciscans, shall we say, in order to accentuate the independence of the theological content from the form, which is the sociological aspect of Franciscanism or of Christianity. Whitman was, to a degree, that type of Franciscan. He was Franciscan in his cult of a simplicity at times dangerously close to simple-mindedness. Franciscan in his pleasure in associating with the uneducated, in delighting in the knowledge of intuitive people, in the spontaneity and the freshness of intelligence even of illiterates, so different from academic and doctoral intelligence, so impregnated with the joy of approaching problems as if man were always an apprentice, never a master; as if he were always, at every moment, beginning to learn, "walking along with life"—as a Minorite has said in defense of his brothers in religion—"in order not to be left behind."

Whitman was a Franciscan also in his taste for always going about dressed in work clothes or wearing an open-collared shirt, just as the other Franciscans, the religious disciples of the Saint, went about in a plain gray habit of coarse and rough cloth. He acted on the theory that clothing makes the man (and to a certain degree it does); that constant wearing of work clothes and systematic repudiation of the bourgeois frock coat, of the conventional businessman's sack coat, of the academic or bureaucratic black swallow-tailed coat, of the bachelor's or doctor's gown, eventually turns the intellectual into the man of the people or brother of the man of the people that he would like to be; that work clothes, worn all the time and not only for a bourgeois' stint at painting a wall or repairing a bathroom faucet, eventually become a second skin for the intellectual, a layer or a coat of social flesh over his individual's flesh—and are not the costume of one who might make of his populism or of his proletarianism a kind of masquerade or literary or political carnival.

"I see clearly"—wrote Whitman in 1871—"that the combined foreign world could not beat [America] down." So that if America failed, she would be defeated or prevented from fulfilling her mission, from realizing the American spirit, from spreading what was universal in the American spirit, by enemies within, not without. The "American programme," as he called it, was not addressed, in his opinion, to social classes—neither to the bourgeoisie nor to the proletariat—but to "universal man." Hence the expansionist or universalist character of that program.

When an Argentine statesman proposed, instead of the Monroe doctrine of "America for the Americans," the famous concept of "America for humanity," he was in a sense repeating Whitman. For

Whitman's Americanism always aimed at universal man. Everything in his writings indicates that he always considered the American Revolution more universal than the French Revolution: it was a revolution in favor of man, not only of one group or one class of men. As Whitman respected human personality, he obviously could not conceive of "universal man" reduced to a caricature of American man. He seems to have conceived only that the circumstances of their history had given Americans magnificently ample opportunities to develop democratic forms of human intercourse which, as general forms, though with different ideological content and many peculiarities of national or regional stylization, could and should be extended to the whole world in the interest of so-called "universal man." At least that is how I interpret what can be called the American expansionism or the democratic imperialism that is found in Whitman, a mystic faith to which he gave poetic expression with Messianic vigor.

Although he considered the American democracy of his time "an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary and esthetic results," Whitman nevertheless kept a belief, a faith, a confidence in an America Messianic in its "programme of culture" for the whole world. He explained it thus: "True, indeed, behind this fantastic farce"—the gaudy materialism of the United States—" . . . solid things and stupendous labors are to be discover'd, existing crudely and going on in the background, to advance and tell themselves in time." It was in order that more should be done for the people, in order that those solid things might grow and those stupendous labors might increase that his prophetic voice was raised more than once in an attempt to attract the most capable and most honest Americans to political activity. America, taken as a whole, was perhaps doing very well in spite of all the depravity of businessmen and all the corruption of bureaucrats who jeopardized the democratic health of the community. It was principally "the dilettants, and all who shirk their duty" who were not doing well. Hence Whitman's cry: "Enter . . . into politics. I advise every young man to do so." Let everyone inform himself of the facts; let everyone try to act for the best; let everyone vote. He was not enthusiastic for political parties; but he recognized the necessity of parties, of elections, of voting. He addressed himself chiefly to the independents—farmers, clerks, mechanics, laborers: let these, ever vigilant, be the decisive element in elections. It is almost with fury that he insists on condemning the attitude of the dilettantes, in

whose minds political activity had become so corrupt in the United States that there was no salvation for American democracy.

Whitman was a personalist. It would not have been easy for him to accept the positivist generalization that it is always the individual who is in ferment and humanity that leads him. He lived too close to the phenomenon represented by Lincoln not to believe that there are moments in which the opposite is true: humanity—or a great part of humanity—is in ferment, and it is a great man who leads it. A man who, when he is really great, does not let himself be moved by his contemporaries' excesses or be dominated by their hatreds for class or race or sect; a man able to place eternal values before those of the moment, to uphold great sentiments over small ones: the passion for justice, for example. Lincoln. All Lincolns. They have not been numerous, those Lincolns, but they have existed. The second Roosevelt was one of them, and we are suffering for lack of him. The really great men are those who attempt or achieve the conciliation of antagonistic points of view instead of incarnating ideals or interests exclusive to one class, one race, one nation, one sect, one creed. Whitman was himself a human orchestra in whom echoed and by whom were expressed diverse and even contradictory ideals.

That is why he is a poet even more for today than for his own time. It is the American people of today—the people of all the Americas, not only of English America—who are absorbing him today.

For our age, it would seem, is destined to synthesize or integrate values that in the eyes of the men of the nineteenth century were irreconcilable: such diverse values as socialism and personalism, Christianity and Marxism, intellectualism and intuitivism. Whitman was one of the first to develop the concept, the notion of synthesis that is to characterize the world of tomorrow. A champion of the "divine average," he nevertheless upheld, against the democratic principle of the average, the somewhat aristocratic principle of personality—aristocratic in that it puts a special value on quality. It implies creative personality conscious of its creative power, able to synthesize, to interpret differences and antagonisms.

Perhaps it can be said that Whitman's faith in the common man came from the conviction that, if all men were given an equal opportunity for expression and creation, there would arise from among common men some intellectually and esthetically uncommon men who would benefit the whole community and its total culture. He was not dreaming of a leveling of all men; but of the opportunity

for each one to develop to the full his own personality within a framework of equal opportunities for personal development. Once this integration of the rights of the individual with those of the community is reached, much will have been achieved in the direction of synthesis between the antagonisms that still oppose each other: collectivism represented today chiefly by the incomplete Soviet democracy, and individualism or, in the most advanced milieux, personalism, represented today by the likewise incomplete democracies of the West, of which Whitman's America has become the greatest: the center of a real social and cultural system that can be defined as Euramerican, whereas the collectivist system is, in a way, Eurasian. The "East" and the "West" from which Professor F. S. C. Northrop hopes for a new synthesis, greater, sociologically, than the Thomist or even the Christian synthesis. The greatest efforts of man today should be in the direction of integrating or reconciling those antagonisms. Hence the value of Walt Whitman for our time.

"Camerado" Whitman defined himself almost a hundred years ago by an Americanism that was pan-human in its perspectives, in its meaning, and in its program of cultural expansion. The Orient will, in all certainty, eventually absorb a large part of that Americanism; and at the same time that Americanism will be enriched with Oriental values within the conception outlined in his recent book by Professor Northrop. According to him, it is not economics, so highly touted today by the Anglo-Americans and by the Soviet Russians, that is the key to the humanities; it is the humanities, including the esthetic factor, that are the key to the solution of the problems of economics.

"Camerado" Whitman loved his neighbor fraternally without disdaining himself: rather he sang his own body—his whole body—to the point that people thought him narcissistic and even obscene. But he was neither narcissistic nor obscene, he was personalistic. An intense personalist—that is what he was. It may be repeated here that in his political ideas he was a passionate personalist, in contrast to those who boast of being superiorly impersonal and coldly dispassionate. For "Camerado" Whitman, political activity was a manner of expressing his moral passion. His passion for social justice. His passion for human solidarity. His passion for the community, embodied in his eyes chiefly by the common man.

If he definitely approached socialism at the end of his life, as one of his most authoritative biographers claims, he always inclined—I repeat—toward ethical, not mechanical or deterministic social-

ism. Personal, not impersonal, socialism. Pan-human socialism, not narrowly proletarian socialism, which glorifies only manual or mechanical labor and is hostile to intellectual, artistic, freely scientific, superiorly technical work; or hostile to religious activity. The socialism that is ardently interested in moral values, not the socialism that is uninterested in those values because its practitioners or its apologists believe in an absolute economic determinism within which human problems are mechanically solved without any human intervention except that represented by cynically Machiavellian maneuvers destined only to accelerate the solutions.

Though Whitman believed firmly in Science with a capital S, his humanism never lost its fluidity, never hardened into political, economic, or sociological determinism. I do not know to what extent he was familiar with the sociology or the sociologies of his day. In any case it is certain that he foresaw an original sociology born of America; and everything seems to indicate that in that sociology he did not see a new expression of determinism within which there would be no room for Lincolns or Whitmans, for the great men who contain multitudes within themselves instead of being contained by them.

I believe that his faith in science would allow of the anti-scientific restrictions so well expressed in late years by another clear-sighted American—Charles A. Beard—and, more recently, by Northrop. Beard points out that if all human affairs were reduced to law or to a kind of terrestrial mechanics, man's very control over occurrences and actions would become meaningless. And “the past, present, and future would be revealed as fixed and beyond the reach of human choice and will. Men and women would be chained to their destiny as the stars and tides are to their routine.”

Meanwhile the sciences of man, far from authorizing us to believe in economic determinism or sociological fatalism, continue to allow plenty of room for the adventurous humanism, the experimental democracy, the life incessantly renewed in various of its aspects by man himself which is constantly found in Whitman's thought, in his democratic spirit, and in his Americanism, always tempered by the most anti-mechanistic, anti-doctrinaire, and anti-deterministic of personalisms.

Whitman in Israel

WHITMAN WAS KNOWN and admired by Hebrew poets and critics long before the establishment of modern Israel. Uri Zvi Greenberg was writing about him thirty years ago, and since then Rabbi Benjamin, Isaac Rivkind, and Hillel Bavli have continued to discuss him in Hebrew language publications. Many of his poems have been translated into Hebrew by Greenberg, R. Benjamin, Jr., S. Pinski, Abraham Regelson, Reuben Grossman, S. Shalom, and Simon Halkin.

In an interview published in the New York *Herald Tribune Book Review*, March 26, 1950, S. Shalom, a journalist and poet of Tel-Aviv, explained why he liked to translate Whitman: "Whitman's pioneering is very close to us, and so are his Biblical rhythms. To translate him into Hebrew is like translating a writer back into his own language."

The most extensive translation of Whitman into Hebrew has been executed by Professor Simon Halkin, a widely-respected poet, novelist, and critic now teaching at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1952 the Workers' Book Guild published his four-hundred-page version of selected poems from *Leaves of Grass* with a long critical Introduction. Although the book was expensive, the edition sold out in one day. "The poetry of Whitman is appearing in its Hebrew translation in difficult days," Professor Halkin wrote in his Introduction. "But I think that it has the power to strengthen man's faith in himself and in the value of life on earth. It can also strengthen the forces of young poets, who are seeking a way to integrate their personal lives with the life of their people in its homeland."

Reviewing this translation in *Scopus* (March, 1952), Dr. Sholom J. Kahn declared, "Professor Halkin's poetical genius, critical insight, and passion for American democracy fuse in his version of *Leaves of Grass*. . . . Whitman seems to 'belong' in Hebrew. Many of his passages read like echoes of oriental 'wisdom' literature—as if Ecclesiastes and the author of Proverbs were to speak with a modern accent. . . . We must all be grateful indeed to Professor Halkin for providing a great American poet with his proper home in the mansions of Hebrew literature."

Since Professor Halkin's Introduction has been highly praised by Israeli critics, it would seem to be the best candidate for inclusion in this collection of foreign criticism of Whitman. However, a complete translation would be too long for this book, and extracts would not do the essay justice. The editor decided, therefore, to print an original contribution (written in English) by Dr. Kahn on "Whitman's Sense of Evil. . . ." Although this essay is in no way nationalistic, it is Hebraic in the sense that it was written by a brilliant young scholar of Israel, and perhaps only a critic with Dr. Kahn's knowledge of Hebrew and modern literature could so acutely appraise Whitman's moral and theological sensibilities.

Before the establishment of Israel there was a flourishing international Yiddish literature, and Whitman is said to have had a considerable influence on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Yiddish poets. Louis Miller, of Brooklyn, has translated a selection, *Walt Whitman's Poems from "Leaves of Grass,"* which the Yiddish Cooperative League of the Yiddish International Workers Order, of New York, published in 1940. Earlier S. Gorelick had discussed Whitman and translated excerpts from his poems into Yiddish in *Great Souls*, Dresden, 1921, pp. 102-120.

Whitman's Sense of Evil: Criticisms*

By Sholom J. Kahn

I

NO FINAL ESTIMATE OF A GREAT poet's value is possible, since his works undergo a constant process of reliving and reinterpretation. Our current evaluation is always a doubly complex compound of two "senses," two areas of feeling—and thought, two total responses: the final impression left by his works, after all the processes of

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analysis—aesthetic, biographical, historical, and philosophical—have been completed; and the present state of the critic's education, taking the critic as representing the spirit of his age brought to a high point of consciousness, and using "education" in its broadest, richest sense. Hence the difficulty of doing full justice to our final sense of such a subtle aspect of Whitman as his "sense of evil."

The conclusions to be summarized here have sprung out of a consideration of F. O. Matthiessen's judgment in *American Renaissance* that (quoting Yeats) Whitman as well as Emerson "have begun to seem superficial, precisely because they lack the Vision of Evil."¹ We have found that, if this was so, it was at least not the result of indifference to the problem; rather, the facts and philosophies of evil were Whitman's profound concern in all the stages of his development. Yet, at his best, he succeeded in maintaining, with as much consistency as one may expect of a poet, a doctrine best summed up, perhaps, in these lines from "Starting from Paumanok":

I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,
I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I
say there is in fact no evil,
(Or if there is I say it is just as important to you, to the land or
to me, as any thing else.)

And that this sort of formulation was not merely a position abstractly or superficially held is clear from the extent to which its consequences are evident throughout the poems themselves: in Whitman's uses of the "catalogue" device; in his fondness for paradoxical declarations, "transvaluing" good and evil; in his concern with the contradictions between appearances and realities; in his imagery; and in his powerful lyrical expressions of such themes as loneliness, bereavement, sleep, and death.

It should be unnecessary, in criticizing Whitman's "sense of evil," to use the sharp tools of logic in order to reveal his obvious contradictions. Indeed, one of the characteristic traits of the pantheist—all too painfully obvious in the modern "dialectician," whether of the right Hegelian or the Marxist variety—is his ability to elude criticism because of his all-embracing claims and his techniques for reconciling opposites: if his statements go against familiar laws of evidence and reasoning, they must be interpreted in the light of a "new logic" and a new conception of law. Whitman's strongest defense, then, will be in the nature of a religious or mystical affirmation, and will partake of the quality of love. Something of this sense of loving identification is found in the criticisms of Professor Simon Halkin (The Hebrew University), in the penetrating essay ("Walt

Whitman: His Life and Work," 433-550) included as an appendix to his Hebrew selection and translation of *Leaves of Grass*.² Especially in his chapter on "Basic Foundations of Whitman's Poetry," he takes the position that these foundations "impel Whitman's work from beginning to end, *without any change or permutation in themselves*" (479, Halkin's italics). Whitman's greatness, for Professor Halkin, is integral and changeless, giving expression to his deep loves for the world of existence as sensed in all its particularity, for mankind, and for America and its mission in world history; and reconciling such pairs of paradoxical opposites as the individual and the democratic masses, body and soul, materialism and God, America and the world, and man as the culmination of evolution and as a transient and momentary phase of the process. Obviously, criticizing Whitman's Muse as self-contradictory will not lessen her value in the eyes of her lovers.

We may begin, then, by accepting the complexity of that "unity in variety" which is Walt Whitman, that "affirmer of life, whose poetry is never more powerful than when it treats of death";³ we will not do him justice if we abstract one half or part from the total picture. One example of the subtle sort of analysis which results from such a sympathetic, synthetic, and catholic reading may be cited from Professor Halkin, namely, his comments on the "I Sit and Look Out" poem (1860): "This last sentence, 'all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,/See, hear, and am silent,' is seen by some scholars as a key to a sort of 'Brahministic' tendency in Whitman's poetry, a kind of complacent contemplation, which is its own end. But whoever will discriminate the true nature of this tendency—which would seem to be: there is something in it of a deceptive mannerism even in those poems which are completely lyrical, and most personal and emotional, such as sections from 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,' 'The Wound Dresser,' and even 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'—will not be misled by the 'Brahministic' theory in his understanding of the poem quoted. We are not to accept at its face value the evidence of the poet himself, so to speak, that he does nothing but 'See, hear, and be silent.' The entire poem, even though it does not include guideposts for the amelioration of the situation through actual action—though one who reads with a critical ear might well expect something of the sort here—contradicts the proposed interpretation. The seeing of 'all the sorrows of the world and . . . all oppression and shame' is a motif which is constantly being repeated in Whitman's poetry and

which always bears witness to a persistent sensitivity, aching, and with many 'feelers' responsive to the suffering of mankind as a whole and of men individually in their abnormal social reality." (535)

II

I understand the large hearts of heroes,
 The courage of present times and all times,
 How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the
 steam-ship, and Death chasing it up and down the storm,
 How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faith-
 ful of days and faithful of nights,
 And chalk'd in large letters on a board, *Be of good cheer, we
 will not desert you;*
 How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and
 would not give it up,
 How he saved the drifting company at last,
 How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from the
 side of their prepared graves,
 How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the
 sharp-lipp'd unshaved men;
 All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
 I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

Given this initial realization of complexity, however—and putting aside for the moment the problem of Whitman's "integrity," which is far from being a simple issue—we may yet legitimately proceed to question whether some of the opposites he attempts to reconcile may not in fact be irreconcilable (or at least unreconciled by Whitman), and what the relative values of his attitudes may be.

Without attempting to argue the point, I proceed in this essay from the assumption that good and evil are objective realities, whose structures have been delineated by philosophers and moralists, and whose qualities have been expressed and realized for us by the greatest prophets and poets. I propose to quarrel here with Whitman's treatments of suffering and sin, and may begin by considering the familiar paragraph quoted above from Section 33 of "Song of Myself." Concerning this passage, Randall Jarrell has written: "In the last lines of this quotation Whitman has reached—as great writers always reach—a point at which criticism seems not only unnecessary but absurd: these lines are so good that even admiration feels like

insolence, and one is ashamed of anything that one can find to say about them."⁴ Despite this warning, I feel that it is precisely at this point of his highest power (the lines *are* good) that criticism of Whitman is necessary, and I can only hope that my remarks will not put me to shame.

If I were stricken dumb by such passages in Whitman, and this one may be taken as representing at its best a considerable body of his poetry, it would be not only with wonder at their frequent power, but also with a slight feeling of embarrassment. "The only coin in which we can discharge our debt to suffering," Professor Whicher wrote recently, in another connection, "is attention to it, but Emerson seems to evade this obligation" (*Ibid.*, 286). Or, since we are not concerned with Whitman as man, but with Whitman as poet, the poet must know how to make his *readers* pay attention to suffering, if that is his subject. My trouble is that, in most such passages, I find it difficult to believe Whitman: *he says* that he suffered, but he doesn't make *me feel* that it was so.

To use a familiar analysis: there have been three main types of poems, hence three main types of treatment of suffering: the lyrical, the narrative, the dramatic. Here, in order presumably to make us *feel* the suffering, Whitman is attempting the narrative technique. (In the previous two lines—"My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs,/They fetch my man's body up dripping and drown'd"—he was wiser, leaving the details of the "story" to the reader's imagination.) But Whitman's story of the brave skipper does not possess me, as a true story—those of Joseph and his brothers, of Achilles' anger, for instance—should possess me: the details do not seem related organically according to some inner necessity; the allegorical Death chasing the "wreck of the steam-ship . . . up and down the storm" strikes me as incongruous and a little ridiculous; I am too conscious of Whitman's individual voice in "he knuckled tight" and "faithful of days" and in the skipper's words of encouragement; I do not really *see* "the lank loose-gown'd women" and the "old-faced infants." And my crowning embarrassment is precisely with the concluding lines: I very much doubt whether, if Whitman really *were* "the man" who "suffer'd" and "was there," he would have said: "it tastes good, I like it well . . ."

In general, I find Whitman's pictures of human suffering fragmentary and external—hence superficial, not "lived." Within these limits, they often achieve a kind of power: "The malform'd limbs

are tied to the surgeon's table,/What is removed drops horribly in a pail" (the very vagueness of "malformed" and "horribly," and in the latter word the unusual use of an adverb instead of the more familiar adjective, stimulate my imagination). But even at best (as throughout Sections 34-36 of "Song of Myself") they seem amateurishly told, nothing fully realized, achieving chiefly a sort of melodramatic picturesqueness. Thus: "I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,/Hell and despair are upon me . . ."—neither the wincing (a physical response) nor the hell and despair (a reported state of the soul) is made to seem convincing—despite the repeated claim: "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person,/My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe." Whitman has here made me conscious, not of how the wounded person feels, but of what I tend to interpret as his own *pose*: "I lean on a cane and observe." And at worst, of course, his melodrama can be most painfully inept: "Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his hand,/He gasps through the clot, Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments."

The weaknesses of Whitman's narratives of suffering become doubly clear when they are compared to the masterpiece of that kind, namely, Dante's "Inferno":⁵

Here sighing, and here crying, and loud railing
Smote on the starless air, with lamentation,
So that at first I wept to hear such wailing.

Tongues mixed and mingled, horrible execration,
Shrill shrieks, hoarse groans, fierce yells and hideous blather
And clapping of hands thereto, without cessation

Made tumult through the timeless night, that hither
And thither drives in dizzying circles sped,
As whirlwind whips the spinning sands together.

(III, 22-30)

Hear truth: I stood on the steep brink whereunder
Runs down the dolorous chasm of the Pit,
Ringing with infinite groans like gathered thunder.

Deep, dense, and by no faintest glimmer lit
It lay, and though I strained my sight to find
Bottom, not one thing could I see in it.

"Down must we go, to that dark world and blind,"
 The poet said, turning on me a bleak
 Blanched face; "I will go first—come thou behind."

Then I, who had marked the colour of his cheek:
 "How can I go, when even thou art white
 For fear, who art wont to cheer me when I'm weak."

But he: "Not so; the anguish infinite
 They suffer yonder paints my countenance
 With pity, which thou takest for affright;
 Come, we have far to go; let us advance."

(IV, 7-22)

Somehow I have complete "poetic faith" that Dante "wept to hear such wailing"; that Virgil's cheek grew pale with pity; and, at the conclusion of the magnificent Canto V, I accept the story that Francesca tells—as I could not accept Whitman's tale of the skipper's rescue, and I believe of Dante that

While the one spirit thus spoke, the other's crying
 Wailed on me with sound so lamentable,
 I swooned for pity like as I were dying,

And, as a dead man falling, down I fell.

(V, 139-142)

—as I find it difficult to believe of Whitman that he "suffered" and "was there."

This is not intended so much as a comment on Whitman's personality, though it is undoubtedly influenced by what I know of his biography; we have not yet, thank God, devised a sort of "lie-detector" test for "measuring" (and thus comparing) intensities of suffering, and even if we had done so we should not be in a position to apply it to dead poets. My criticism here is an aesthetic one: in Dante's poem, the scenes of suffering are subtly differentiated, as steps in the progress of a journey through Hell, and not least by the poet's various reactions (weeping, fear, fainting, and so forth) to what he sees—in Whitman such scenes are scattered pellmell, not completely undifferentiated of course, but with differences that seem much less significant; in Dante, the entire purpose of the poem, by means of its incomparable fusion of literal and symbolic actions and meanings and images, is to penetrate to the *essence* of each kind of suffering—in Whitman each instance of suffering tends to be

superficially observed, an isolated vignette, with no attempt to understand and little success in entering into its human reality. As Mr. Jarrell writes: ". . . there is no 'point of view' at which we can stand to make the judgment, and the moral categories that mean most to us seem no more to apply to its whole than our spatial or temporal or causal categories seem to apply to its beginning or its end" (*Ibid.*, 74). I find Mr. Jarrell's later statement of Whitman's complexity a fair one: "Whitman specializes in ways of saying that there is in some sense (a very Hegelian one, generally) no evil—he says a hundred times that evil is not Real; but he also specializes in making lists of the evil of the world . . ." (*Ibid.*, 76). However, I find it difficult to accept Mr. Jarrell's final characterization: these remain for me largely (not merely) *lists*, remarkable in their own special ways, but not always "of an unarguable reality"; too often Whitman's undeniable hits are weakened by being scattered among many misses, and even the reality of the hits tends to be something simply "named" without being "realized."

III

Another way of stating this limitation of Whitman's "sense of evil" is contained in the term "melodrama," which we have already used twice to define certain of his qualities, as contrasted to a truly "dramatic" treatment of suffering. Whitman seems as incapable of portraying effectively another's pain through action and dialogue, as he is of doing so through narrative: his few attempts in the dramatic style, like the early stories—such poems as the "Song of the Banner at Daybreak"—are among his weakest productions; the closest he comes to success is in a sort of dramatic *monologue*, as in "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night" and the "Prayer of Columbus," where the "I" is almost inevitably taken to be Whitman himself, and not the soldier or discoverer whose voice he is attempting to be. On this point, a distinction recently made by George Barker, referring to the "negative capability" attributed by Keats to Shakespeare, is relevant: "It is this supreme neutrality that permits the poet to delight in the apparent creation of evil, ugliness, and despair. This supreme neutrality is the opposite and antithesis of that withdrawal from life achieved by the religious mystic. 'Not until the soul has divested itself of the love of created things can it aspire to the divine union.' I will paraphrase this exquisite pronouncement of St. John of the Cross to make my meaning clear. 'Not until the soul has invested itself with the love of *all* created things can it

aspire to the poetic union.' For the poet is a man who has elected to love all things, even all unlovable things, because he cannot exist in the abstract: he is bound to and by all objects and subjects. This is that 'universality' of Shakespeare's, a love of all created things which, exercising its force in all directions, cancels itself out and thus leaves the poet laboring, as I say, in a supreme neutrality."⁶ In Whitman we have the somewhat curious phenomenon of a special sort of "religious mystic," writing poems undoubtedly filled with a kind of "love of all created things"—but sharply contrasted with Shakespeare's kind, in that his "world," as Mr. Jarrell says, is "a waste with, here and there, systems blazing at random out of the darkness" (*Ibid.*, 74); and these systems of particular things take their reality, not from their interactions with one another in an objective world, but from being felt and perceived (however externally) by Walt Whitman, who seems to function somewhat like God in Berkeley's idealistic universe. In such a world, of course, and with *this* sort of "negative capability," there is no room for an Oedipus or a Lear.

Still another way of defining this limitation is to say that Whitman's treatments of evil are pathetic merely, rather than tragic. Reinhold Niebuhr has defined the difference as follows: "Pathos arises from fortuitous cross-purposes and confusions in life for which no reason can be given, or guilt ascribed. Suffering caused by purely natural evil is the clearest instance of the purely pathetic. . . . The tragic element in a human situation is constituted of conscious choices of evil for the sake of good. . . . Tragedy elicits admiration as well as pity because it combines nobility with guilt."⁷ It was Whitman's attempt to be ethically neutral, to achieve a state "beyond good and evil," which seems to have produced the effect of dehumanization we have noted in his treatments of human suffering. His catalogues are designed precisely to make us look upon evil as something "purely natural":

The homeward bound and the outward bound,
The beautiful lost swimmer, the ennuyé, the onanist, the female
 that loves unrequited, the money-maker,
The actor and actress, those through with their parts and those
 waiting to commence,
The affectionate boy, the husband and wife, the voter, the nom-
 inee that is chosen and the nominee that has fail'd,
The great already known and the great any time after to-day,
The stammerer, the sick, the perfect-form'd, the homely,

The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that sat and sentenced him, the fluent lawyers, the jury, the audience,
 The laugher and weeper, the dancer, the midnight widow, the red squaw,
 The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is wrong'd,
 The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark,
 I swear they are averaged now—one is no better than the other,
 The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored them.

(“The Sleepers,” Section 7)

Evil and good are here conceived, almost entirely—even “the criminal” and “the great,” though these would seem to imply moral criteria—in terms of disease and health, physical and spiritual; “the beautiful lost swimmer” is a perfect example of pathos without tragedy.

IV

Thus, yet still another, and perhaps the most fundamental, way of stating our point is to say that Whitman lacks a sense of sin. Not completely, for there are lingering sensations of guilt in his contrasts of appearance and reality, for example (the “hell under the skull-bones” theme); as William James put it, “He is aware enough of sin for a swagger to be present in his indifference towards it . . .”⁸ As with his feelings for human suffering, so here too we are not criticizing Whitman the man, so much as the poet: the consequence of his rejection of the Orthodox religious categories was—despite Mr. Jarrell’s insistence on his “charities and concessions and qualifications that are rare in any time” (*Ibid.*, 75)—a lack of moral discrimination which constantly hovers between the sublime and the ridiculous. It is rash, indeed, for any man or poet to ignore the accumulated wisdom of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and other great ethical teachers; it means that entire worlds of human experience are closed to him. Baudelaire and Rimbaud, for example, are far from Orthodox, but their having lived in a Catholic country gave body to their “verses of evil.” Whitman’s Quakerish simplicity (“innocence” is not quite the word) is in this respect characteristically “American.”

It is somewhat startling, and chastening, to recall that Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), in the seclusion of Amherst, was an almost exact contemporary of Whitman (1819-1892), since she provides such a perfect contrast to him; and to state her virtues is to reveal his limitations. (She is more useful to us, perhaps, in this respect than Dante and Shakespeare, since she is Whitman’s fellow-countryman and also a lyric poet.) Miss Genevieve Taggard has stated the

case for Emily with a fine precision: "Only when Emerson ran away from the American scene and became an Oriental sage did he admit unity. Whitman admitted it in America and obliterated all values, all gradations, by calling everything 'good.' Life was good, and death was heavenly death, and the common prostitute was the equal of anyone under heaven, and the pismire is no less perfect than the grain of sand or the egg of a wren or the journey work of the stars. This will to see life without distinctions made Whitman's poetry very nearly into formlessness—the vague, the indefinite, the large were ideals in life and art both. We find, since he cannot construct, since he cannot make form, that his chief method when he is not using language for these effects of formlessness is the making of a catalogue; simply a list of things—all equal, none inevitable. Emily says:

The soul *selects* her own society,
Then shuts the door.
Behold the atom I *preferred* . . .

Preference, choice, rejection, *valuation*, are her whole art. Not only is one thing good and another bad, one thing chosen and another rejected; but one thing is chosen as fitting for a special instance, and another retained for its proper time. We thus see that Emily made in life and in art an infinite number of judgments. Her aristocratic nature failed to see any fault in such behavior—vulgarity consisted in the inability to discriminate."⁹ Whitman's "formlessness" is here perhaps exaggerated; but to develop this contrast with Emily Dickinson more fully would take us too far afield.

Suggestive parallels, and contrasts, to Whitman's attitudes towards sin are contained in the Jewish rite of Confession for the Day of Atonement. The parallels consist in the merging of the individual into the group, and in the use of a "catalogue," which begins: "We have trespassed, we have dealt treacherously, we have robbed, we have spoken slander, we have acted perversely and we have wrought wickedness, we have acted presumptuously, we have done violence, we have framed lies . . ." and goes on for some four pages, in various forms. Thus, "The Confession is impersonal so far as the conscience is clear of the sin avowed; the saintly and the sinful may, according to Jewish teaching, pronounce it alike, since it is an acknowledgement of the sins of the whole congregation of the House of Israel—our own sins and the sins of our fathers—in accordance with the passage in Leviticus xxvi. 40, 'And they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, in their trespass which they trespass

against me . . .'"¹⁰ The contrasts, of course, are even more significant than the parallels: the Jewish catalogue is one of veritable sins ("For the sin wherein we have sinned before thee"), not of "natural evils"; they are organized according to a rational, traditional scheme; and they constitute a challenge to self-criticism and a call to humility and prayer: "for all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement."

These parallels and contrasts are made, not in order to suggest any specifically Jewish influence on Whitman—though the influence of the Bible, of course, must not be overlooked—but because it has become a somewhat uncritical commonplace to speak of Whitman's "Oriental" mysticism and religion. However, one should not treat the Orient, and its literary and religious values, as monolithic. Professor Niebuhr makes the following distinction: "Spiritually the Orient is informed by religions which are either mystic and pantheistic such as Buddhism and Hinduism; or humanistic and collectivist such as the Confucianism of China or the Shintoism of Japan. Pantheistic religions can find no significance for the individual in the integral unity of his spiritual and physical life. The purpose of religious redemption is the annulment of individual existence and its incorporation into a divine unity" (*Ibid.*, 124). Whitman is thus a pantheist with a difference, an *American* pantheist, precisely in his emphasis on *the individual*. And Judaism, with its double influence on Christianity and Islam, has its roots both in Europe and in Asia. This is not the occasion to attempt to settle such complex issues, but we hope to have cited enough examples to indicate why what seems like Whitman's persistent blindness to the complexities of the moral life must limit his value—especially, perhaps, for those reared in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

V

This, one may say, is to make an unreasonable demand: Whitman was, after all, not a theologian but a poet. But even a neoprimitive like D. H. Lawrence also focused his profound criticisms of Whitman around (his own rather special form of) our indictment that Whitman was lacking in the most necessary kind of sympathy for suffering and in discrimination of moral values.¹¹ Quoting "And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral dressed in his own shroud," Lawrence added: "Take off your hat then, my funeral procession of one is passing" (263). Whitman could never fulfill his own claim that he "becomes in his own person the whole world. . . . Because to *be* a thing he had to know it" (263).

Yet "Whitman is a very great poet, of the end of life . . . of the transitions of the soul as it loses its integrity" (267). "Whitman like a strange, modern, American Moses. Fearfully mistaken. And yet the great leader. . . . Surely it is especially true of American art, that it is all essentially moral. Hawthorne, Poe, Longfellow, Emerson, Melville: it is the moral issue which engages them. They all feel uneasy about the old morality. . . . But they know nothing better, mentally. Therefore they give tight mental allegiance to a morality which all their passion goes to destroy. Hence the duplicity which is the fatal flaw in them. . . . Whitman was the first to break the mental allegiance. He was the first to smash the old moral conception that the soul of man is something 'superior' and 'above' the flesh. Even Emerson still maintained this tiresome 'superiority' of the soul. Even Melville could not get over it. Whitman was the first heroic seer to seize the soul by the scruff of her neck and plant her down among the potsherds." (268-269).

This is Whitman's positive message: "A morality of actual living, not of salvation. . . . This was Whitman. And the true rhythm of the American continent speaking out in him. He is the first white aboriginal" (270). But "He didn't follow his Sympathy" (271). "Whitman said Sympathy. If only he had stuck to it! Because Sympathy means feeling with, not feeling for. He kept on having a passionate feeling for the Negro slave, or the prostitute, or the syphilitic. Which is merging. A sinking of Walt Whitman's soul in the souls of these others. . . . Whitman came along, and saw the slave, and said to himself: 'That Negro slave is a man like myself. We share the same identity. And he is bleeding with wounds. Oh, oh, is it not myself who am also bleeding with wounds?' . . . If Whitman had truly *sympathized*, he would have said: 'That Negro slave suffers from slavery. He wants to be free himself. His soul wants to free him. He has wounds, but they are the price of freedom. The soul has a long journey from slavery to freedom. If I can help him I will: I will not take over his wounds and his slavery to myself. But I will help him fight the power that enslaves him when he wants to be free, if he wants my help. Since I see in his face that he needs to be free'" (272). "This is sympathy. The soul judging for herself, and preserving her own integrity. But when, in Flaubert, the man takes the leper to his naked body; when Bubi de Montparnasse takes the girl because he knows she's got syphilis; when Whitman embraces an evil prostitute: that is not sympathy. The evil prostitute has no desire to be embraced with love; so if you sympathize with her, you won't try to embrace her with love. . . . The evil woman who wishes

to infect all men with her syphilis hates you if you haven't got syphilis. If you sympathize, you'll feel her hatred, and you'll hate too, you'll hate her. Her feeling is hate, and you'll share it." (Compare Dante's indignant anger at the "wrathful" Filippo Argenti, in Canto VIII.)

These are true words:¹² and they were written by a master of narrative fiction whose special gift is just his extraordinary capacity for "feeling with" his character—by a great lover and a great hater. This capacity Whitman never really revealed; if he had had such a capacity, he would probably have written better, or at least quite different, poetry.

Whitman's lack of discrimination in affection—"Your mainspring is broken," Lawrence wrote. "Walt Whitman. The mainspring of your own individuality" (*Ibid.*, 262)—which, as I have said, hovers between the sublime and the ridiculous—is brought vividly home to us by a letter he wrote "To Lewis Kirke Brown and Hospital Comrades, Washington":

Brooklyn, November 8, 1863.

Dear son and comrade, and all my dear comrades in the hospital I sit down this pleasant Sunday forenoon intending to write you all a good stout letter to try to amuse you as I am not able at present to visit you like I did. . . . Lew I wish you was here with me, and I wish my dear comrade Elijah Fox in ward G was here with me—but perhaps he is on his way to Wisconsin. . . . Lewy I was very glad to get your letter of the 5th—I want you to tell Oscar Cunningham in your ward that I sent him my love and he must try to keep up good courage while he is confined there with his wound. Lewy I want you to give my love to Charley Cate and all the boys in ward K, and to Benton if he is there still—I wish you would go in ward C and see James O. Stilwell, and also Thomas Carson in same ward, and Chambers that lays next to him, and tell them I sent them my love. Give Carson this letter to read if he wishes it. Tell James Stilwell I have writ from here to his folks in Comac L. I. and it may be I shall go down there next week on the L I railroad; and let him have this letter to read if he wishes it. Tell Manvill Winterstein that lays next to him in ward C that I send him my love, and I hope his wound is healing good. Lew I wish you to go in ward B and tell a young cavalryman, his first name is Edwin, he is wounded in the right arm, that I send him my love, and on the opposite side a young man wounded in the right knee, and also a young man named Charley wounded in left hand, and Jennings and also a young man I love that lays now up by the door just above Jennings, that I sent them all my love . . . [and so on for a full page!]

Lewy I would like you to give my love to a young man named Burns in ward I, and to all the boys in ward I. —and indeed in every ward,

from A to K inclusive, and all through the hospital, as I find I cannot particularize without being tedious—so I send my love sincerely to each and all, for every sick and wounded soldier is dear to me as a son or brother, and furthermore every man that wears the union uniform and sticks to it like a man, is to me a dear comrade, and I will do what I can for him though it may not be much. . . .¹³

One cannot believe that Whitman really “loved”—in any ordinary acceptance of the term—“all the boys” equally and “sincerely”; in any case, he remembers them by externals chiefly, almost as if he were writing from a notebook (“on his way to Wisconsin,” “wounded in the right knee”), the same quality we have noted in his poetry. “I find I cannot particularize without being tedious.”

Justice requires, however, that this criticism of Whitman’s style of love for his fellow-men (if it may be considered a proper subject for criticism: we are touching here on most subtle and subjective elements in human relations and character, the final judgment of which must rest not with men but with God) be tempered by at least two considerations: First, the extraordinary circumstances of war, in which that style was most fully exhibited; thus what might seem a bit ridiculous in a normal peace-time situation may take on a quality of sublimity when a nation’s survival is at stake. Second, the fact that this method of cheering up the boys in the hospitals was adopted by Whitman more or less consciously—that is, we may legitimately speculate concerning the subconscious motives which may have been involved—as indicated in the following passage from a letter to his mother, from Washington, September 8, 1863:

Indeed, Mother, there are camps here of everything . . . when I meet black men or boys among my hospitals, I use them kindly, give them something, etc.—I believe I told you that I do the same to the wounded Rebels, too—but as there is a limit to one’s sinews and endurance and sympathies, etc., I have got in the way, after going lightly, as it were, all through the wards of a hospital, and trying to give a word of cheer, if nothing else, to every one, then confining my special attentions to the few where the investment seems to tell best, and who want it most.¹⁴

Indeed, the entire series of letters in *The Wound Dresser*—hinting, as Dr. Bucke wrote in his Preface, of “other qualities and characteristics than the literary, some of them as important and as valuable, which may be more or less adequately conveyed by print”—is relevant here. But we cannot separate this Civil War Whitman from the lover of Manhattan’s anonymous crowds; and we find it difficult to escape completely a note of willful self-exploitation, of “pose,”

even here, in the ranks of death. Let each reader attempt to judge this delicate issue for himself, if he can. We may rest content with the observation that this wholesale "charity" in the man, however interpreted, corresponds closely to certain qualities in his poetic style, qualities which some of his readers find objectionable.

VI

What then remains? No deep fellow-feeling, perhaps, for human suffering, inept story-telling, melodrama and pathos, a simple-minded ignorance of sin—is this the essential Whitman? What remains, of course, is a great lyric poet: a master, in his special domain, of language and style; and one who spoke out, passionately and eloquently, to the full range of his individual soul. The only grief, the only "evil," Whitman profoundly understood was his own, but within that range he was truly a master. As Lawrence wrote: "In *Calamus* he changes his tune. He doesn't shout and thump and exult any more. He begins to hesitate, reluctant, wistful" (*Ibid.*, 265). When he speaks for his deepest self, on the great themes of loneliness and frustration, love and bereavement, sleep and death, doubt and faith, then indeed "even admiration feels like insolence." It is in this purely lyrical sense that we are to understand the quotation with which we began: "I understand the large hearts of heroes." The emphasis here is on the "I understand," not the "heroes," who are invested with something of Whitman's own "large heart." He did *not* understand heroes as the story-teller or dramatist understands them—he was no Homer or Shakespeare—but the thought of them produced in him a feeling of exaltation which he was capable of putting into words. By its nature this was a relatively limited gift, tending at its worst to sentimentality, at its best to a mysticism which, perhaps, only fellow-mystics could share; but some measure of his stature is revealed by the fact that we do not find it completely ridiculous to discuss his gifts in the company of those of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. Allowing him this limitation, we can freely acknowledge the greatness of the lines we began by questioning: "All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,/I am the man, I suffered, I was there." Whether or not Whitman is here taken to be feeling *for* or feeling *with* his people—and I incline to Lawrence's interpretation, that it is the former—the poignance of his personal emotion is unmistakably real. The emphasis is still on Whitman's ego ("All this I swallow, it *tastes* good, *I* like it well, it becomes *mine* . . ."), but it is an ego of great

comprehensiveness, passion, and, within the limits we have been defining, sincerity.

One further qualification, this time in Whitman's favor, namely, that Whitman's feelings for his country—and through it, for the whole world and all mankind—were a genuine part of his private, lyrical self; at least, he makes us believe so. "America" to him—the idea perhaps a bit more than the reality, though he succeeded in putting a great deal of the reality into words—was a kind of Platonic mistress with whom he carried on a love affair all his life. He felt and understood and wrote of the suffering of his *nation* more effectively than of the sufferings of other *individuals*. Thus, some of his best poems are those in which the public grief has become truly private, as in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"; and hence the permanent importance of the prose *Democratic Vistas*. Again, how deeply Hebraic in spirit! Whitman's feelings for America are not unlike those of Jeremiah for Jerusalem in Lamentations: "How doth the city sit solitary, That was full of people! How is she become as a widow!"

If Whitman ever achieved tragic depth, then, it was in the realms that were strictly private, or in those that were strictly public—with very little in between. As Herbert W. Schneider has written: "The 'watching and wondering' aspect of Whitman became more marked during the years that followed the 'victory' of the Union, as he became increasingly aware that his 'democratic vistas' were visionary in the face of the dominant tendencies and standards of American life. His philosophy of life became also a philosophy of death and resurrection—a tragic democracy. The depth of his tragic attitude, his complete renunciation of democratic politics, appeared most conspicuously when the rise of populist democracy failed to arouse him in the slightest."¹⁵ Here, indeed, there was more than pathos; there was discrimination of good and evil, judgment, choice, and guilt. "Just as his love poems grew out of the conflict between what he dreamed and what he actually attained, so his political lyric emerged out of the discrepancy between the America he saw and the America he wished for."¹⁶

What then of Whitman's "sense of evil," as a whole? His serenity, his final acceptance, was hardly one of weak complacency, but was achieved after much tension and struggle. He wrote best about what he knew best; his own inner joys and sorrows, and those of his nation, with which he identified himself. However, if his final note was the comic one (in the highest sense) of optimism and faith, of

harmony and reconciliation, this was not clearly conceived, in Dante's manner, in terms of a one-way journey along a traditional path. His "earthly" paradise, purgatory, and hell are rather constantly playing off against one another, in complex patterns of uneven value; and if any total picture emerges it is one of constant expansion and growth, like the rings of a tree. In that sense, Whitman was the best spokesman for the anarchic, expansionist America of the mid-nineteenth-century.

But, *mutatis mutandi*, new conditions create new values: as Miss Taggard wrote concerning Emily Dickinson: "Emily voices, for America, an art of choice which it has not yet learned or begun to practise. She pictures life in scale and in value, in choice and rejections, in form and design—not in mere quantity, mere bulk, mere amorphous welter" (*Ibid.*, 238). Yet America can well rejoice that she found her true bard, to "make a song for These States" in the wild and romantic days of her careless youth. And the sin-conscious Judeo-Christian, with his standards set by the Bible and Greek tragedy and Homer and Dante and Shakespeare, may yet find in Whitman's Yankee pantheism a constant reminder that, for other temperaments and on other continents, other religious and poetic values may be possible and valuable.

Notes

¹New York: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 181.

²First published in Merhvai, Israel, by Sifriat Poalim (The Workers' Book Guild), 1952.

³S. E. Whicher, "Emerson's Tragic Sense," *The American Scholar*, Summer, 1953.

⁴"Walt Whitman: He Had His Nerve," *Kenyon Review*, Winter, 1952, p. 75.

⁵Dorothy L. Sayers' translation, Penguin Classics, 1949. Quoted by permission of Dorothy Sayers and Penguin Books, Inc., Baltimore, Md.

⁶"Shakespeare and the Horse with Wings," *Partisan Review*, July-August, 1953.

⁷*The Irony of American History*, New York: Scribner's, 1952, vii-viii.

⁸*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: The Modern Library, original date, 1902, p. 84.

⁹*The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*, New York, 1930 (1934), p. 237.

¹⁰*Service of the Synagogue*, Published under the sanction of the late Dr. Hermann Adler, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, 1904; 6th edition, London: George Routledge, *Day of Atonement, Part I, Evening Service*, p. 79 (note).

¹¹"Whitman," *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923. Quotations from *Selected Essays*, Penguin Books, 1950.

¹²We should discount Lawrence's anti-rationalism and anti-traditionalism, however; of course *judgment* must include intellectual processes and should make use, refurbishing when necessary, of the keen tools bequeathed to the soul by the wisdom of the ages; "the soul" cannot simply "judge for herself."

¹³*The Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman* (The Inner Sanctum Edition), Edited by Louis Untermeyer, New York: Simon Schuster, 1949, pp. 930-932.

¹⁴Walt Whitman, *The Wound Dresser*, Edited by R. M. Bucke, Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898, p. 113.

¹⁵*A History of American Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1946, pp. 164-165.

¹⁶Frederik Schyberg, *Walt Whitman*, Translated from the Danish by E. A. Allen, New York: Columbia University Press, 1951, p. 59.

Whitman in Japan

WALT WHITMAN HAS BEEN KNOWN, translated, and written about in Japan for over half a century, and the editor of this volume planned to include some Japanese interpretations, but the translations were not completed in time for inclusion. However, Mr. Mitsuru Ishii, President of the Japan Publishers' Association, and Mr. Shigetaka Naganuma, the best-known translator of Whitman's poetry and prose into Japanese, have kindly supplied some information for this introductory note.

In October, 1892, Sōseki Natsume published an essay on Whitman based on Edward Dowden's "The Poetry of Democracy: Walt Whitman." In 1898 Kanzō Uchimura and Chogyū Takayama published essays on the American poet after reading *Leaves of Grass*, and in 1907 Wasaburō Asano wrote an article based on Rossetti's edition of *Poems of Whitman* and Thomas Donaldson's *Walt Whitman, the Man*. It is understandable that most Japanese interpretations of the poet have had to be based on limited sources.

While in the United States in 1920 Mr. Naganuma became a friend of the Traubels and visited places associated with Whitman's memory. For a while he lived in New York at 41 West Ninth Street, on the same floor with Richard le Gallienne and Anzia Yezierska, and enjoyed lively discussions with them over English and American authors of the eighteen-nineties. After returning to Japan, Mr. Naganuma began translating Whitman. Mr. Ishii also visited the United States in 1923 and became interested in American literature.

The translation of Whitman was interrupted in Japan during the Second World War, but since the end of the war at least a

dozen new editions of Whitman's poems and prose have been published (see list in *Selected Bibliographies*). And in the summer of 1953 the friends of Whitman in Japan held an exhibition in Tokyo that contained three hundred and fifty-six items, made up of editions, biographies, a few manuscripts, photographs, criticisms, and other material. The greeting of the American Ambassador and an introduction written by the Exhibition Committee are printed, with their kind permission, on the following pages. Though brief, they convey a clear impression of Walt Whitman's importance in present-day Japan.

Statement*
by

The Honorable John M. Allison,
Ambassador of the United States to Japan

AS THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was drawing to its close, the British poet Swinburne besought Walt Whitman in America to

Send but a song over sea for us,
Heart of their hearts who are free,
Heart of their singer, to be for us,
More than our singing can be.

This was only one memorable identification of Whitman with that small group of supernationalists whose singing so stirs sensitive hearts everywhere, evokes a response so spontaneous and genuine, that except as a convenient label, the singer's native origin is merely academic and incidental.

Perhaps only of Whitman who "contained multitudes," is it true that he was both the earliest of the voices of democracy in America and, in his conception of his mission as a poet, also her first cosmopolitan. If he celebrated the beauties of his native land, it must not be forgotten that in his *Salut au Monde!* he paid tribute as well to

The Japan waters, the beautiful bay of Nagasaki, land-lock'd in its mountains . . .

Though he extolled "the Pennsylvanian, the Virginian, and the double Carolinian," he expressed kinship also with those who live on the continent of Asia, in Africa, Europe, Australia, and the archipelagoes of the sea, as well as with "You Japanese man and woman."

*Reprinted from the catalogue of the 1953 Walt Whitman Exhibition in Tokyo.

In 1860 the first mission from Japan to America arrived to exchange in Washington the ratified copies of the Treaty of Commerce of 1858. It included Fukuzawa Yukichi, founder of Keiogijuku University. When they visited New York, Whitman composed one of his greatest poems *A Broadway Pageant* to commemorate those "two-sworded envoys" who

Over the Western sea hither from Nippon came.

So moved was he, indeed, that he exclaimed:

These and whatever belongs to them palpable show forth to me,
and are seiz'd by me,

And I am seized by them, and friendlily held by them, . . .

For this reason, therefore, among many others, it is most appropriate that in the Perry Centennial Year commemorating the event by which this first Mission was, in a sense, initiated, the memory of Walt Whitman should be celebrated by his admirers in Japan. The fine exhibit here assembled is no mere collection of antiquarian curiosities; rather in variety and in chronological range it bespeaks a long and sympathetic understanding of Walt Whitman's poetic creed and a warm response to that greeting which, many years ago, he addressed to the Japanese people.

Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!
Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the
earth, . . . [*Salut au Monde!*]

June 18, 1953.

[Signed] John M. Allison

A Word About the Whitman Exhibition*

A Whitman exhibition was first proposed to a group of us Whitmanites by our common friend, Dr. Ryuzaburo Shikiba last fall. However it was not until last May when all of us got together in Tokyo and discussed details of the plan to be carried out that we finally reached the decision that the exhibition be held in the later part of July in the exhibition-rooms of the Maruzen Book Store, Tokyo.

On that occasion we also talked about enlisting the support of all those who showed interest in Whitman in the past and who might possibly have some Whitman books or reference items. But, after considering the lack of time for adequate preparation, we had to give up this idea. We decided to exhibit only our own materials.

*Reprinted from the catalogue of the 1953 Walt Whitman Exhibition in Tokyo.

We are well aware, of course, that what we could gather here is probably only a part of the Whitman materials now in existence in Japan and that it is only a very, very small portion of those in America and Europe. Still we attach much significance to this event and look forward to it with great anticipation.

More than sixty years ago the works of Whitman were first introduced to Japanese readers by Kinosuke Natsume, then a Tokyo University student, but now under a pen-name one who is being identified as one of the foremost novelists of modern Japan. Since then, many writers and poets have translated his works, especially his poems and many have written articles about him. In 1919, the year which marked the centenary of Whitman's birthday, two different translations of his selected poems were simultaneously issued in book form for the first time. From that year to the present, hundreds of thousands of copies have been published and sold. Moreover, of late, it is almost customary to find a piece or two of Whitman's poems included in High School textbooks every year. It is safe, therefore, to say that the name of Walt Whitman and his poetry are now quite familiar among the Japanese people.

However, one thing which we must point out with much regret is the lack of serious study of Whitman as a man and poet. Contrary to his apparent popularity there is not a single volume of full-length biography of the poet written by a native Japanese author. While in America and elsewhere we can readily name more than a score of university professors and writers of note who have written books and critical studies of highly scholastic merit on the poet, the situation in Japan is entirely different. We have never heard of a university professor who has ever written an essay on him worthy of mention. We dare say that there is not one Holloway, not one Allen, not one Cleveland Rodgers.

In 1882 our beloved Lafcadio Hearn wrote about Whitman's poetry for a New Orleans paper and said: "Leaves of Grass" may be preserved awhile by curiosity, like ferns in a mantel-vase—but they will crumble away, withered by public contempt or indifference just as soon as curiosity has been satiated. Well, apologies to Hearn-San, but his prophecy has failed. And why? Even now many scholars in America as well as in Europe are seriously attempting to clarify the major theme of his works, his conception of the "divine average" and the relation between the man and his works.

We hope that our present exhibition, however small in its scale, will be instrumental in stimulating more interest in this great

American poet, a symbolic figure of true democratic ideals and a major force in world literature, and pave the way for more serious study of his works, study which we can be proud of for its excellence in scholarly accomplishment. Our aim and our labor of love in this exhibition would then be perfectly rewarded.

Availing ourselves of this opportunity, we also wish to tender our profound thanks to the many officials of the American Embassy, particularly Mr. William H. Giltner, who have shown interest in our undertaking and spared no effort to assist us in every possible way to make this exhibition a success.

July, 1953

Whitman Exhibition Committee

Shigetaka Naganuma
Muneyoshi Yanagi
Ryuzaburo Shikiba
Ki Kimura
Shogo Shiratori
Mitsuru Ishii

Whitman in India

ONLY A FEW OF Whitman's poems have ever been translated into any of the languages of India, yet many students of Indian literature have felt a close affinity between Whitman's ideas and the teachings of Vedanta. Dr. Dorothy Mercer, who has probably made the most thorough examination of the subject of anyone in America, quotes an Indian scholar as saying that Whitman "must have studied *The Bhagavad Gita*, for in his *Leaves of Grass* one finds the teachings of Vedanta; the Song of Myself is but an echo of the sayings of Krisna." Exactly how Whitman got his ideas has never been settled. It is sufficient merely to say here that *Leaves of Grass* does contain many parallels to the philosophical and religious concepts of India.

Perhaps for this reason Whitman could never be a great influence on Indian authors, but his writings have frequently brought about a *rapprochement* between minds of the two countries. Romain Rolland, in *Prophets of the New India* (1930), reported that in 1897 while Vivekananda was visiting his friend, Turtha Ram Ramtitha, professor of mathematics at a college in Lahore, he found a copy of *Leaves of Grass* and asked permission to borrow it that he might "read and re-read it." When he first read the poems is not certain from the account, though perhaps in 1897, but we are told that, "He used to call Whitman 'the Sannyasin of America.'" Later Ananda Coomaraswamy also pointed out many parallels between Buddhist thought and Whitman's in *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916).

One of the most competent present-day Indian students of Whitman is Dr. V. K. Chari, who wrote a thesis on Whitman for his doctorate and includes him in the courses he teaches at Durbar College, Rewa. Recently in an article in the *Aryan Path* he told his Indian readers that Whitman demonstrated the spiritual side of American democracy, and to Americans he suggested that Whitman's spiritual ideals could counterbalance their own materialism and thus help preserve their democracy, and ultimately civilization itself.

Although this article is only partly about Whitman, it serves as a fitting climax to this volume of foreign criticism of "the poet of democracy."

Americanism Reviewed*

By V. K. Chari

"WORLD HISTORY IS MORE likely to be shaped by American history for the next half century than by any other element . . ." said Harold J. Laski in his *American Democracy*. The emergence of America as a world power is one of the most astounding events of modern history, considering the surprisingly brief preparation that went before it. America has so greatly influenced our life and thought that the speed with which it is expanding seems to be almost overwhelming us. That it will continue to shape the course of events and influence the political and economic lives of peoples in an ever-widening area seems inevitable. The development of America is therefore of as vital a concern to the rest of the world as it is to the Americans themselves, for how history is to be shaped depends on how "Americanism" itself is shaped.

It is time that we re-examined the values for which Americanism stands before we accept it or reject it with an unquestioning mind; time, too, that Americans themselves paused to look upon their own achievements and to clarify for themselves the implications of their own progress.

*Published in *The Aryan Path*, January, 1954. (Written in English.) Reprinted by kind permission of Dr. Chari and the editor of the *Aryan Path*, who stated in a headnote: "The present leading position of the U.S.A. in the councils of the nations makes its people's attitude and outlook matters of concern throughout the world. Dr. V. K. Chari's sympathetic approach in this article to the qualities and achievements of the American people as also to the problem of democracy in their country will be welcome to many in the U.S.A. as well as elsewhere who are alive to the present need of reaffirming and implementing traditional ideals."

"Americanism" is understood to be a term for material and technological progress and for sheer physical expansion. This is accurate only in so far as the wealth and prosperity of America are responsible for her influence in the present-day world. America has no doubt conquered the world by the sheer enormousness of her production, and has become a pivotal factor in international development. But it is reassuring that "Americanism" also denotes a culture, that it signifies the character of a people who have certainly something distinctive to give to the world. American culture is a unique blend produced by the interaction of diverse forces, races, ideas and customs, modified by the impact of a new environment.

The Americans are an adventurous, pioneering people; a restless and irrepressible energy is characteristic of them. Their history and natural environment have made them an active people with Work as their worship, and have bred in them a practical attitude which values action more highly than contemplation, work more than leisure.

These qualities are extremely valuable for the development of peace and prosperity in a democracy in which people are keenly conscious of their individual and collective responsibilities and work untiringly for their own well-being and comfort. But these very qualities when developed to excess may produce inner contradictions which will distort human society and sap the vitality of democracy.

In the history of the United States a stage of deep emotional crisis born of disillusionment has perhaps been reached. Industrialization, mass production and consequent centralization of wealth have profoundly affected American democracy. They have brought about a large-scale social transformation, leading to the diminution of the individual and producing a deep feeling of uneasiness and frustration. Amid all the immense achievements there are signs of a slow decomposition of faith. Conscientious thinkers outside and a powerful section of the intellectuals within the country may be feeling that the American promise remains unfulfilled and that the American people have belied the expectations of their forbears and founders.

What lies at the root of the present *malaise*? The development of America has been unequal and ill-balanced. Americans have made giant strides towards material expansion and prosperity without a corresponding advance toward spiritual self-integration. In

their anxiety to build a prosperous world they have sacrificed the contemplative to the active values; in trying always "to do," they have lost the pleasure of Being. In their anxiety to build a New World they have for the most part eagerly and sedulously fled from everything, even the good, for which the old world stood. But it was a great American poet who sang:—

I loaf and invite my soul . . .

In the "pep" and "hustle" that are modern America the voice of the soul is largely unheeded. In the midst of the feverish competitive struggle and business rush the Americans have displayed a lack of the qualities of stability and repose. Pragmatic philosophy has in effect deified action as an end in itself and, by glorifying the struggle of life, has discredited the search for ultimate meanings and purposes. But action, or its physical expression at least, must have a stop somewhere; and our present pursuits acquire meaning only in the light of an ultimate Ideal. Action is but a preparation; it is consummated in contemplation. Even Marx held out some leisure for all as an ultimate goal of Communism. Ceaseless activity and expansion will lead the world to terrible clashes and will prove to be the enemy of peace.

Great men like Emerson and Thoreau perceived this vital danger inherent in American democracy and warned that America, in her intoxicating sense of puissance and prosperity, might drift toward a purely materialistic civilization. Whitman warned his countrymen that without the infusion of a spiritualizing force American democracy would prove to be a colossal failure. America perhaps needs a sobering influence to counteract and mitigate her excessive dynamism. In the past, civilizations have arisen only to fall when, in reckless zeal for expansion they have lost the power of refreshing their inner lives.

India might offer America a corrective to the excesses in her character and Americans might do well to study the Indian sense of values and readjust their own values in its light. This is not to suggest that Americanism lacks inherent sustaining strength. The inspiration that can revitalize Americanism is contained within itself. What is needed is a clarification and reaffirmation of the historic American values, those which its founders and great men conceived and aspired after. That America has great potentialities for the building of human civilization is certain; but how her people will shape their destinies and fulfil themselves will depend on whether they understand Americanism as a moral and spiritual

faith or as a technological principle. Whitman wrote:—
How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
I feel thy ominous greatness evil as well as good.

At this moment, when America is on the eve of momentous decisions and is becoming increasingly responsible for the turn of world events, it may be well for those who are shaping her course to remember and ponder the great ideals and principles of their masters, which are the underpinnings of the whole structure of American democracy. Especially they may with profit ponder the message of Walt Whitman, their greatest prophet of democracy, review their achievements in its light and possibly correct their present attitudes. There is need today, more than ever before, to proclaim and reaffirm the democratic possibilities envisaged by Whitman, for the stake for which we are striving and struggling is no less than the future and security of democracy itself.

Today America has taken upon herself the noblest of tasks, that of preserving democratic institutions. She is fighting heroically against the forces that are working to the derogation of the individual. But how far she will succeed in her difficult task will depend on how clearly she can recognize and how positively she will reaffirm the faith that democracy is something more than a political system or a form of government, that its meaning is deeper than political theorists can define, and that its object is not simply to build a prosperous world but also to liberate and preserve the individual. For the spirit of individualism is the quintessence of American democracy as conceived by Whitman and others. Whitman's faith was built upon the conviction of the intrinsic worth of every human being—"the divine pride of man in himself," as he called it. According to him, democracy was the surest safeguard and guarantee of individual values. Its ultimate purpose was to protect and cultivate the highest spiritual values found in the individual soul, to raise the spiritual level of what he called the "divine average." A democracy that contented itself with its achievements in industry and technology, with its high productivity and development, would miserably fall short of its highest fulfillment.

Democracy is a means to the forming of individuals, to inner cultivation, and is not its own excuse for being. It is valuable only in so far as it yields spiritual results. Whitman no doubt recognized the value of material welfare and economic enrichment; they were, in fact, indispensable for any inner development. But he clearly

perceived the danger in disregarding this essential spiritual element in democracy and in laying an overemphasis on material values. He insisted that the foundations of democracy must always be in the spirit.

It would be tragic if, through moral confusion, man came to exalt success over wisdom and to mistake prosperity for insight. The greatest threat to the security of the democratic idea is this threatened loss of the power to evaluate truly; when man confuses means with ends and allows himself to be mastered by his tools, the machine will become a Frankenstein's monster and override him. Power and prosperity pursued to excess may completely blur our vision and blunt our sense of values. Hence the American Transcendentalists set themselves to the task of creating a new metaphysics for democracy and exploring its moral and spiritual foundations. Whitman suggested idealism as a counterpoise to "the growing excess and arrogance of realism," the modern worship of fact. He constantly reminds us that outward expansion and material aggrandizement are not the criterion of the greatness of a democracy, but the cultivation of "superior and spiritual points of view," from which human achievements can be evaluated. It is only in the light of these ideal values that our practical endeavours will become at all significant. Once men lose this sense of values, they will engage in mean pursuits.

The creating of economic values is not the highest accomplishment and human capacity is not best realized in economic endeavours. The proper ultimate object of economic organization is to furnish a secure basis for the expression of individual capacities in non-economic directions. Through a programme of material orientation we can create the conditions in which human energy can be released for the pursuit of higher values. It is the distinction of Indian culture that it has always shown deeper appreciation of the values of inwardness and depth than of those of expansion and enrichment. It has dedicated itself to inner seeking and thinking. That is the quintessence of the faith of Whitman also.

Americanism is becoming more and more intricate in the midst of a complex civilization and the controlling of its development will become increasingly difficult. We can only hope that the American people will keep alive the high traditions of their forbears and continuously strive to approximate their present endeavors to the ideals of their great men of the past. Upon this will depend the future fulfillment of the American destiny.

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Slavic Countries*

By Stephen Stepanchev

Editor's note: This selected bibliography for Slavic Countries is longer than the others because most of the bibliographical information printed here is not available anywhere else in English.

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